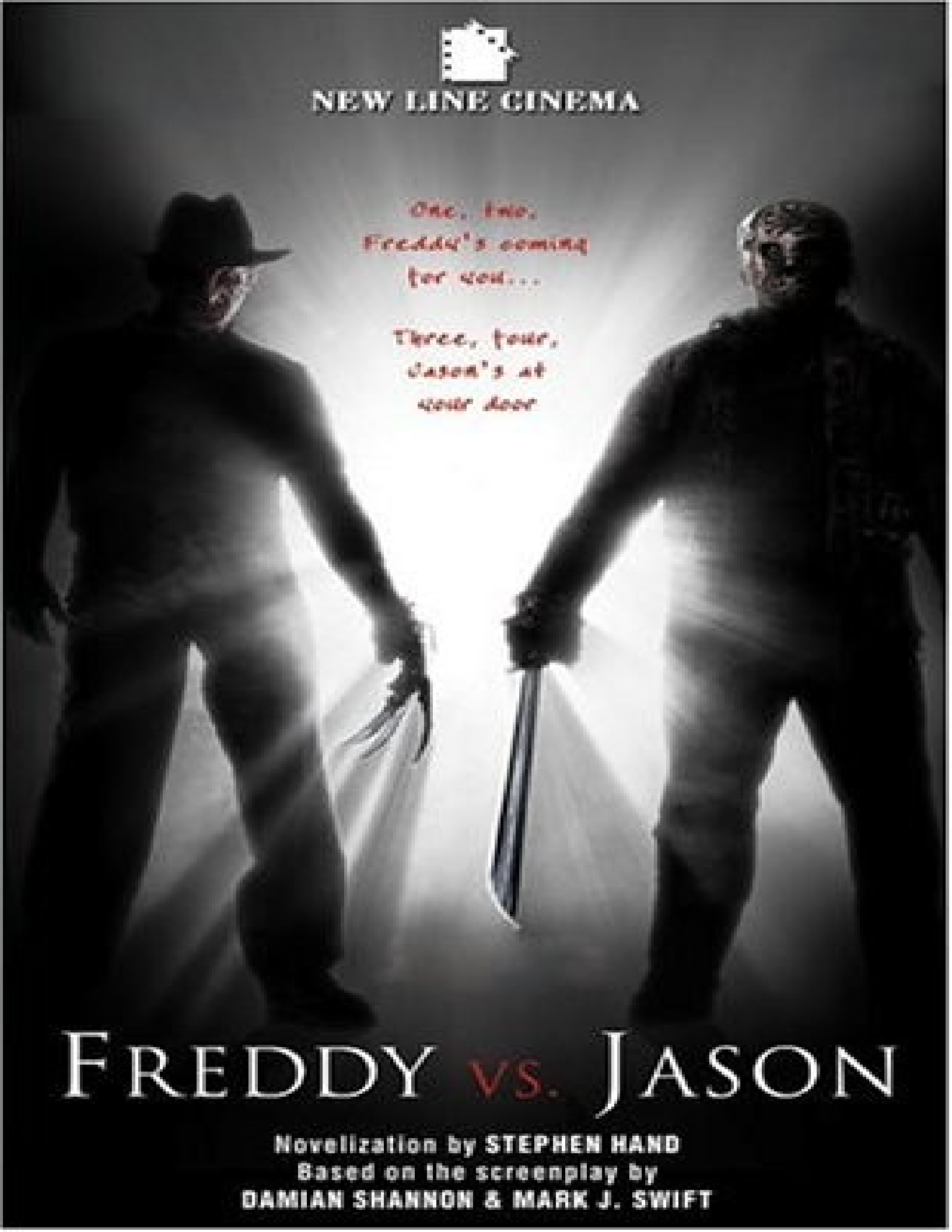

FREDDY vs. JASON

Novelization by STEPHEN HAND
Based on the screenplay by
DAMIAN SHANNON & MARK J. SWIFT

PROLOG

A cry in the darkness.

No, not darkness. The room was dimly lit by the flame from an old furnace, and there was a smell of rusted iron in the air. Or maybe, just maybe, it was the smell of blood.

Another cry.

Someone was in the room, but the cry didn't come from him. The cry was the terrified whimper of a small girl, whereas the figure, outlined as a shadow in the light of the open furnace gate, was a man. And he was just a man right now. In fact, he was a pretty regular guy. He had a house, a wife, and a daughter of his own. And he had a job. Well, actually he had two jobs, and they were both done down here...

In the boiler room...

Of the power plant...

Where he was throwing a child's doll into the raging flames of the furnace.

The face of the doll started to blacken and melt. Soon its entire body caught fire, and was turning into pink plastic pulp, dressed in smoldering white and blue polyester. Its brown nylon hair flared up in a plume of toxic smoke. Its glass eyes sunk and fell, perversely morphing its features from baby face to death's head—from cradle to grave—in a matter of seconds.

But little dollies don't cry.

The man laughed as the plastic girl went up in smoke. This was all part of the show. The chase. The catch. The fear.

It was okay for the toy to burn up quickly like that, but his real victim would have to take much, much longer to kill.

Let's rephrase that.

His real victim would have to take much, much longer to torture, mutilate and then kill.

That's better.

Much better.

Come to Daddy.

The man slammed the furnace door shut, confident that nothing would remain of this piece of evidence. What? You think a grown

man would play with dolls? What kind of sick bastard would do that?

No.

This man, this creature, this... this twisted fuck, he only played "house" with the real thing. He played with real little girls. He had fun with them. He played with them in the nastiest, most evil, most unforgivable ways. He played with them to death. All twenty-nine of them.

This little bitch was number thirty. Lucky for some. Unlucky for others!

The furnace door closed with a groaning, grating sound that reverberated throughout the room. And that's when her crying turned into screaming.

The sweet young girl, huddled in the corner of the room, already knew that she was going to die. The man had kidnapped her, he had stolen her from Mommy and Daddy. He had offered her nice things, and he wore a funny red and green sweater—red and green stripes—but he'd brought her down here, to the bad place. It was all hot and dark down here. The place was old, and it was filled with pipes and metal stairs and stuff, and boilers, and ovens. And no one ever came down here except the bad man. He'd dragged her down here and tied her up. And then he'd hurt her—real bad. He had these gloves, these bad gloves. Some of them had spikes on them, some of them had animal claws, but his favorite was the one he was wearing today.

His favorite glove had five long razor-sharp knives fixed over the five grimy fingers of his right hand.

She could see it now.

Standing like a black silhouette in front of the blazing furnace, the man was sharpening his finger-knives on a stone. Sparks flew in all directions from the deadly glove, and in the flickering shower of lights, the girl could see the man's eyes.

He was watching her.

The girl knew the man was going to hurt her, because each time he came and hurt her, he stood and walked in a funny way. He wriggled his knives as if they were alive. He always did that before he hurt her.

He was doing it now.

Tears streamed down her five-year-old face. She didn't understand death, she never knew death, but some human instinct within her told her that this final approach of the bad man was the end.

He laughed under his breath as he walked step by step towards the corner of the boiler room festering at the very heart of the industrial complex.

Oh yeah, he was a regular guy.

He had a home—his murderous lair.

He had a wife—he'd killed the snooping bitch.

He had a daughter—she'd been seized for adoption.

He had a mother—a nun raped by a hundred maniacs whose acts of foul violation gave Freddy his ungodly life, while his mother spent the rest of her days locked up in an asylum for the criminally insane.

He had a daytime job—he worked in this boiler room. And he had a... night-time job...

Scrreeeechhhh!

He was dragging the blades of his glove-hand along one of the twisted old pipes surrounding him. Sparks flew, as the five killing razors drew nearer and nearer to their pretty little victim.

She wanted to beg with him, to plead, but she'd already tried that and it was no use. It only made him laugh. Her sad little face would have broken any normal man's heart, but this was no normal man.

Now he was above her—tall, powerful. All she could do was huddle on the floor and scream.

Freddy breathed deeply, his face running with sweat. He wanted to slice her up so bad.

Inside the furnace, the baby doll was melting away into nothing.

Outside the furnace, Freddy Krueger moved in for the kill. This screaming little brat was getting on his nerves. Quick as a rattlesnake, Krueger sprang forward with the deadly glove. He flicked his fingers apart, and aimed two blades right for the whites of her tear-stained eyes.

Pretty girl.

Pretty, pretty girl.

The knives found their mark, and the girl screamed in agony. Suddenly Krueger was upon her, savaging her flesh in the darkness

of the boiler room. The chamber echoed to the sound of her helpless screams—and to the bloodsoaked rending of butchery.

It was all over in just a minute.

She was his.

God, it felt

"Freeze!"

Before he knew it, Krueger was caught in the beam of two flashlights. Cops. With their guns leveled right at his face.

The sick bastard just stood there, his cutting blades dripping with the blood of the dead girl. Officer Perry couldn't believe it. Except for the glove and the crazy striped sweater, Krueger looked like an ordinary guy: black boots, brown pants, blond hair. But that glove…

Only an hour earlier, Officer Perry had received a tip-off that Krueger was the killer—and everyone in Springwood knew another child was missing, so Perry had no time to waste if he wanted to save the poor kid's life.

He had broken into Krueger's house, but Freddy wasn't there. Perry had searched the place… and found something he would never forget.

He found Krueger's lair. He found the place where Krueger planned his attacks. The place where Krueger kept his private bloody trophies. The place where Krueger made his… special equipment.

Back outside, Perry had put out an APB on Krueger, but he and his partner already knew where to look. They'd raced over here, to the power plant on the south side of town—where Krueger worked.

Perry knew he was breaking the rules, but a kid's life was at stake. If only he could've got here a minute sooner, he might have been able to… but no, the girl was dead. She'd been hacked to pieces by this guy with the glove.

It was with grim satisfaction that Perry slammed the cuffs on Krueger and began to read him his rights.

But Officer Perry had fucked up.

Bad.

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Krueger was made to stand trial for the abduction and murder of thirty minors—or at least, that was the plan. On the first day of the first session of the trial, the case was dismissed.

Officer Perry had gone into both Krueger's house and the power plant without a search warrant, which meant that every single piece of evidence the cop had found was inadmissible in court.

Questioned about the incident at the boiler room, Krueger had the balls to say he'd been trying to save the girl. He said he'd heard the girl's cries, and had gone to help her.

His performance was nauseating. People in the public gallery—parents of the children he'd slaughtered—had to sit there and choke back their anger as Krueger got up and gave his statement.

He told the Judge: "I heard the screams, and I ran there as fast as I could. But it was too late. By the time I found her, the girl was already dead. I was worried the killer might still be around, so I put the glove on for self-defense I found it lying on the floor, by the body. I guess I wasn't thinking straight. I can't tell you how relieved I was when Officer Perry showed up like that."

The courtroom exploded with outrage.

Everybody knew Krueger was the killer. When, prior to Krueger's arrest, Officer Perry had broken into Krueger's house, he'd found enough evidence there to have the bastard fried. He'd found photos of the dead kids along with some of the kids' belongings—scraps of clothing, toys, bits of hair—that Freddy had kept as grisly trophies. Perry had even found the tools Krueger had used to make his sick gloves. The cops were certain that if they searched the power plant where Freddy worked, and where he was arrested, they'd find cremated remains of all the missing children there.

But just because Perry hadn't followed proper procedure, all the evidence had to be left just where it was—the Judge's hands were tied. It was crazy. For Christ's sake, Krueger had been caught red-handed. Literally. Fresh blood was found on each of the blades Krueger had been wearing when he was arrested. There was even blood on the damned clothes Krueger was wearing in Court.

But for what?

Krueger, you bastard!

Freddy just sat there smiling, not a hair out of place, dressed neatly in his red and green sweater, safe in the fact no one could touch him—they had no legal evidence. There was nothing anyone could do to stop Krueger as he swaggered out of the courthouse into the bright sunny afternoon of a perfect Springwood day.

Some of the murdered kids' parents came out after him, but what could they do? They pushed him and shouted at him, but he'd had worse fights with the dead kids and they hadn't bothered him, so it was no big deal. He could just sharpen up his glove...

And then start all over again!

Aha-hahahahahahahahaha!!!

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But the grin on Krueger's face that afternoon lasted about five minutes. The moment he reached the bottom of the courthouse steps, the *real* trouble started. People attacked him. They punched him, hurled abuse, threats. Yeah, Krueger might have made a few lawyers rich, and he might have postponed his date with the chair, but he wasn't going to escape justice.

That night, the newspaper headlines all shouted the same unbelievable fact—"SUSPECTED CHILD KILLER SET FREE"—but in the Main Square of Springwood, a lynch mob had formed among the good people of the town, and Krueger had fled for his stinking life.

As the vigilantes gathered, Perry didn't know whether to arrest them or join them—until Sheriff Williams showed up.

The Sheriff, Principal Shaye from Springwood High School, and some of the other municipal leaders soon took charge of the mob, and got everybody organized. Williams sent two men over to the Krueger house, but the place was empty. Which meant just one thing: Krueger had bolted to the only place he would feel safe.

The power plant.

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The boiler level at the base of the power plant was huge. A guy could hide down there for weeks, and nobody knew that infernal place like Krueger. Long, uneventful workdays had driven Freddy mad with boredom; he'd started exploring the plant just to pass the time. But after a while, he came to see the potential of the place. All those abandoned rooms, all those dark empty corridors, all those bolted cellars where no one could hear you, no matter how long and how hard you screamed. The boiler level was a rusted maze—the ultimate in tortured bloody privacy. That's why he'd taken his victims there.

His victims.

Kids.

Children

Little boys and girls aged no more than seven years old.

He'd killed them and cremated their bodies in the furnace of the power plant. How many Springwood light bulbs had been powered by the corpses of the townsfolk's own dead children?

That bastard!

Okay, if Krueger wanted to stay in the boiler room, he could stay in there forever. He could die in his filthy murder hole.

By sundown, Springwood's finest had gathered outside the power plant.

They were all there—Sheriff Williams, Principal Shaye, Officer Perry, parents of the kids Krueger had murdered, parents of kids Krueger hadn't murdered, goddamit. And they were all armed with Molotov cocktails, standing outside the boiler room, ready to turn up the heat.

It was a fine, clear night, and the air was still when Sheriff Williams lit the first bottle and hurled it clean through the broken, dirty pane of the boiler room window. And that was the signal for the people of Springwood to get their revenge. Bottle after bottle burst its explosive contents through the doors and windows of the boiler room, and in no time at all, the place erupted with the intense heat of an all-consuming flame.

Perry took his newspaper, rolled it up, put the scroll of paper into the gasoline-filled bottle, set fire to the paper with his lighter, and got

ready to hurl the Molotov cocktail through the main window of the boiler room. He'd seen Krueger standing over the body of that poor little girl. Krueger had stabbed her through the eyes.

Fry in hell, you bastard!

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And Krueger *was* a bastard—the bastard son of a hundred maniacs—but that night, Fate decreed that Freddy Krueger would not perish in the righteous flames of the parents he'd so very badly wronged.

When the first bottle broke on the boiler room floor, Freddy was already choosing his next victim.

He thought he was safe. He had retreated to his special room, the place he had set up in the bowels of the building, where he took all his little friends for some razor fun. It was the only place the cops hadn't found.

He laughed.

The page he'd ripped out from the local school yearbook he'd stolen was a font of inspiration. The rows and rows of photos of teensy-weensy boys and girls were his muse. And this year had been a very fine vintage indeed.

Twenty-nine of the faces had been crossed out.

Number thirty?

The cops had tried to deny Freddy his fun, but they'd shown up too late.

He slashed the photo of the dead girl with his razor glove—she was history.

Now, who's next?

Ahhh, another sweet young girl.

He stabbed the photo with one of his razors, cutting clean through the page. *Time to get back to work!*

And that's when Sheriff Williams's Molotov hit the floor.

No!

Angel-faced Freddy looked about in horror, as glass bomb after glass bomb shattered on the floors and walls around him.

It's not fair. They can't do this. I'm not guilty. NOT GUILTY!

Soon every surface in Freddy's dirty disgusting lair was ablaze.

There was nowhere for Freddy to run. No escape. But, though he didn't know it, Freddy Krueger wasn't finished yet. In fact, the real fun was only just beginning...

Outside, the people watched as Freddy's item burned. They couldn't see Krueger himself, but the basement of the power plant had become Hell on Earth. Smoke billowed through the broken windows. There was no out for Krueger. He was finished. Springwood had had its revenge. Justice had been done.

Sheriff Williams set the gas canister to the ground. He noticed that the people around him were holding hands, taking strength from one another. These people weren't killers. They were just good, honest townsfolk who'd been pushed too far. They had no choice but to do this. They had to deal with the killer of their children. Williams could understand this: "Sometimes you've just got to protect your children, no matter what the cost."

No matter what the cost.

The last intact window exploded with heat, and through the sound of breaking glass came the terrible shrieks of a burning man.

Freddy Krueger was dead.

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Or so everyone thought.

Had any of the Elm Street parents been able to see into the heart of the fire within the boiler room, they would have witnessed the forging of a horrific pact beyond all human comprehension. For Freddy was not alone in the basement—he had been found.

Three Dream Demons, ancient and all-powerful, had been searching throughout eternity, roaming the dreams of the living until they found the most vile and twisted human ever to exist: Freddy Krueger. And now, at the point of Krueger's impending destruction, the Dream Demons took it upon themselves to appear before him.

Freddy looked on in excitement as the three disembodied skulls appeared out of nowhere and hurtled through the air towards him. The skulls were cruel and bestial in appearance, they were bathed in

an unholy light, and they had short spine—like tails that trailed through the air as they darted this way and that around the child slayer.

"Freddy," growled one of the demons.

"We know what you want," proclaimed the second.

Krueger stood erect and snarled, "I want it all!" Even facing imminent death, the maniac was still in control.

"Of course you do," agreed the second demon.

"Then open up!" commanded the third. "And you shall be... FOREVER!"

One by one, the demons slammed into Freddy, vanishing as they crashed into his very being. And in this moment, the demons transformed Freddy. They gave him the power to cross beyond the line of mortal existence, and the ability to turn the nightmares of man into reality. The demons had made Freddy immortal.

Krueger screamed as the white-heat flames of retribution melted his face. Though saved by the Dream Demons, his body had to die before he could be reborn. And it would take many years for him to regain enough strength to return and use his hellish powers. But when that day came—when Freddy could finally be the dark master of people's nightmares—he'd make those Elm Street bastards pay.

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One, two, Freddy's coming for you...

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"I dreamed about this guy in a dirty red and green sweater. And he had these fingernails that he scraped along things. Actually, they were more like knives or something, like he'd made them himself. Anyway, they made this horrible screeching noise."

The Nightmare on Elm Street was beginning.

Tina Gray was the first to die, the first girl killed by Freddy in her dreams. But when Tina died in her nightmare, she died for real. She was slaughtered like a pig, flung around her folks' bedroom by some

invisible force, gutted, hung to dry, then slammed down onto the ground. A corpse.

Next came Tina's boyfriend, Rob, who was strangled by a blanket and hanged while in police custody. The cops called it suicide, but Rob had died in his sleep. His nightmare had killed him.

One by one, the kids on Elm Street were being murdered, but no one could work out how. No one realized that the victims were all children of those people who had burned Freddy Krueger to death. It took Tina's best friend, Nancy Thompson, to see what was happening. And Freddy returned the compliment by taking a special interest in Nancy. He appeared in her dreams, his face and hands stretching through the wall above her bed as she slept. He gave her friends nightmares—impossible dreams that always ended in death.

Nancy tried to fight back—she warned her friends: "Whatever you do, don't fall asleep!"

But it was no use. Every night, Freddy came back. Freddy, that man in her dreams. The man with the burned face, that hat and the red and green sweater. And those awful, horrible fingers.

Krueger seemed to delight in tormenting her.

"I'm your boyfriend now, Nancy!"

That's what he said, and just to prove it, Freddy murdered Nancy's real boyfriend, Glen. In fact, Krueger liquidized the little bastard—Glen's remains spat up out of the bed in a tower of blood, spraying his entire bedroom crimson. It was Freddy's best dreamkill yet.

But all the time the kids were dying, they didn't even know Freddy was real. They didn't know he'd once been a normal guy. They didn't know Freddy Krueger was Elm Street's guilty secret. Nancy had tried talking to her Mom: "Fred Krueger. Do you know who that is, Mom? You better tell me if you know, because he's after me now."

"He can't get you. He's dead. Mommy killed him." Marge Thompson had been part of the crowd that had torched Krueger's hideout. So had Nancy's father, Police Officer Donald Thompson. They had killed Freddy. They had heard his screams. They were there, they had seen it with their own eyes. And they had buried Krueger’s torched remains in a secret location. So whatever Nancy was thinking, it all had to be in her imagination somehow.

But Nancy wasn't imagining it. In her dreams, she saw Krueger's boiler room, she saw Freddy's scarred and disfigured face, and she saw that glove made of razor-sharp knives.

And then came the real horror.

When Freddy next attacked Nancy's dreams, she struggled with him and grabbed hold of his battered fedora. And when she awoke, she still had his hat in her hands—she had pulled it out of her dreams into the real world.

This set the scene for the final showdown.

Alone, with no one to help or even believe her. Nancy dragged Krueger out of her nightmare and into the reality of her home on Elm Street, where she set fire to him and denied him the fear he needed to exist.

Nancy stood up to Freddy and sent the bastard straight back to Hell.

***

Darkness. It always ends in darkness.

He had tried so many ways to get back, to get some soul food, but it always ended in darkness.

They had saved him from the boiler room fire. They had promised him he was eternal.

They said that as long as he served them, he would live forever, but it always came back to this: long, solitary darkness with only the sound of his ragged, depleted breathing to remind him he was still un-alive.

At first, when Krueger was just a guy in the boiler room, the kids had been for kicks—a hobby. But now... now those meddling Elm Street parents had made him into something else, Krueger needed the kids for strength. He needed to feed on their lives, their fear, their very souls.

Every now and then, he would find a way to break free of this place. He would slip back in through the minds of some horny, pimple-faced brats with too much dreaming time on their hands. On each occasion, he thought he would be free to terrorize Elm Street for

a long, long time. But each and every time, some smart-mouthed bitch would send him straight back to Hell. Even his own family had turned against him.

And now, so much time had passed, so many kids had already died. Their dreams were his way through. They were a portal to the world of the living. But if the kids stopped dreaming about him... if they stopped having nightmares...

Krueger was running out of options. The people of Elm Street were moving on.

"They tried to forget their fear..."

Freddy's voice was low, rasping. It echoed through the darkness of the damned.

"Lock me away like a dirty secret..."

He had searched. He had looked for a way to get back, to start his work again. But it had not been easy. He had been in the darkness almost too long—his frustration would have been unbearable had it not been overcome by the howling fury that coursed through his twisted veins. Krueger was weak, but he craved vengeance. He lusted for torment, for pain, *for more fucking nightmares!*

And now, after finding so many doors in Hell closed to him, Freddy had come upon the answer. There was another way to make the people of Elm Street afraid.

"But I found someone..." he purred. "Someone that'll make 'em remember..."

Freddy turned his bitter angry eyes down into a dark corner of oblivion, and saw...

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CH-CH-CH. AH-AH-AHHH!!!

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The hockey mask lay on the ground where, after the final battle, the Dark Denizens of Hell had left it. The mask was no ordinary face protector—the face it shielded was that of an abomination who had claimed hundreds and hundreds of innocent lives.

Like Krueger, the owner of the hockey mask was a creature beyond death and a true killing machine. Until this moment, no man alive had been able to put an end to its relentless bloody onslaught. But then it wasn't a man who had killed the evil known as Jason Voorhees.

Less than a week earlier, Jason had been caught in a police ambush and shot to pieces. Over a hundred rounds of ammunition had been pumped into Jason before a mortar shell had blown his massive body into hunks of charred meat.

But this didn't kill him.

Jason's foul lifeforce survived, to possess and take over a series of human victims. But these were only temporary hosts; once Jason entered them, their bodies quickly started to degenerate. There was only one way Jason could return to full strength, and that was to be reborn through the body of another Voorhees.

So Jason had returned to his home town of Crystal Lake, where he had murdered and entered the body of his long lost sister, Diana. And through her, Jason had been reborn. But the killer had not been long behind the hockey mask again, before Diana's daughter, Jessica, had plunged an ancient dagger into his heart.

A local proverb ran: "Only through a Voorhees can he be reborn, and only a Voorhees can kill him."

When Jessica's blade cut into Jason, he erupted in a starburst of lost souls and found himself trapped in a brilliant light from above. Jessica could only look on with boyfriend, Steven, as the ground opened up around Jason's feet, and crusted ancient hands—the hands of demons—broke up through the dirt, and dragged the massive, hulking body of the maniac screaming down to Hell.

When the earth closed again, all that was left behind was Jason's broken hockey mask.

It was over, finished.

Voorhees had been killed by his own niece.

Steven put an arm around Jessica. They were both bloody and bruised. Their struggle with Jason had brought them close to death again and again—but they had pulled through and they had won.

Slowly, they turned and walked away, leaving the hockey mask lying in the dirt.

If the two battered survivors had waited just a couple of moments longer, they would have seen a gloved hand burst up through the soil beneath the discarded plastic face-shield. Not just any glove, but one with razor-sharp blades bolted to each of the five brown leather fingers.

And they would have heard a ragged, guttural voice—the voice of Freddy Krueger: "I've searched all of Hell for someone like you." Freddy sounded almost playful. "You're my ticket home! *Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!"*

The razored blades locked into the holes of the cracked white hockey mask, then snatched the mask down through the earth, where it would join Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger in Hell.

ONE

Despite the silvery glow of the full moon high above, the mist rolling in from the lake made it hard to see in the steady darkness of the night.

The lake was immense. It reached from Higgins Haven in the north, to Crystal Point down in the south-west. A wide passage over on the far east side connected the lake to the sea, which most visitors found hard to believe because the lake was always so still, so quiet. Even tonight, even in the mist, the water rippled only gently, calmly, the surface of the lake forming a perfect mirror image of the twisting coils of gray vapor shimmering above it. Yet despite the tranquillity of the lake, something was not quite right here.

Much of the lake was surrounded by a dense forest of coniferous trees, hilly woodland made even more impenetrable by a thick tangle of undergrowth. But there were places where the evergreen wall was broken. The perimeter of the lake ran for miles, and here and there the trees suddenly gave way to open stretches of rocky and dusty shoreline. It was only natural, then, that people would build roads to these places so that they could come and enjoy the beautiful scenery. And it was also only natural that people should want to come out and live by the lake, or maybe just come here for some fun.

In reality, the roads leading up to the lake were little more than dirt tracks, and the few settlements that had been built by the water were nothing more than feeble efforts to tame an indomitable wilderness. Not a single week went by when the people who lived here didn't have to put up with at least one power outage. And when the people here went shopping for groceries, they stocked up for months.

But all that uncertainty somehow made everyone feel closer to nature, as if living by the lake was somehow more real. Staying here was an adventure. You could swim, you could go fishing, or you could just idle your time away in a rowing boat and get away from it all. And the lake was a natural for kids.

Which all goes to explain why, back in 1935, someone thought it would be a good idea to build a summer camp here. They called it Camp Crystal Lake.

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The camp occupied the largest area of open shoreline by the lake, and was nothing more than a few wood cabins built beside a long floating jetty that ran out onto the surface of the water.

It was late now, and the cabin lights had all been turned out—all except one.

Heather was getting impatient. She had somewhere she really needed to be right now, but as a full-time Camp Counselor it was her job to make sure that all the kids in all the cabins were put to bed. So she had gone round the cabins one by one, and called for lights-out.

This was the last one…

Thank God.

Heather hit the light switch and smiled. She looked back along the room. Although it was misty outside, there was just enough light from the outdoor lamps to show that all the kids were quiet and curled up for the night. They almost looked cute lined up in their rows of little camp beds.

Cute?

What was she thinking? They'd been driving her mad all day, with their constant noise and running around; it was about time the little monsters ran out of energy. And it wasn't as if it had been easy to get this particular cabin quiet. It was the kids from New York. They were always a handful, and she always left them till last. But now they were asleep. All of them.

Convinced no one would see her, Heather reached into the straw bag she was carrying.

Beer o'clock!

Heather pulled out the bottle of booze, opened it up and took a swig. Then she took another.

What was she doing here? Why had she taken this dumb summer job? Funny… but she couldn't remember. Whatever.

Another swig.

Time to go.

Heather reached out for the door handle and—

"Heather!"

A voice called from behind her. Heather almost jumped out of her smooth teenage skin and spun around.

It was Billy. He was stood there, right behind her, wearing his pajamas, a sad little look on his eight-year-old face.

"I had a nightmare," he sobbed, half asleep. "Will you stay with me?"

Heather snatched a quick look round the room. Good, no one else had woken up. If she could get Billy back to bed quick, then she could probably get away before they all woke up and started whining.

"C'mon, you're a big boy. Back to bed now." She smiled and tried to look reassuring, but he didn't budge.

Now that Heather's eyes had fully adjusted to the dark, she could see the poor kid looked terrified. Then she saw his eyes flick down to the bottle in her hand.

"Go!" she snapped, suddenly on the defensive. If that kid told anyone...

Billy raced straight back to bed, more frightened of Heather's sudden outburst, than by the boogeyman of his bad dreams.

"Damn it." Heather shook her head and dropped the bottle back in her bag, where it landed snugly on a red and white beach towel.

Billy was still scared and shaking in his bed when he heard Heather walk out of the cabin and gently close the door after her. Then he heard her lock it.

***

Despite the mist, it actually wasn't a bad night to go swimming. The fog was due to evaporation. It had been warm over Crystal Lake for, well, as long as Heather could remember, so the water was a good temperature for skinny-dipping.

The camp was quiet now, and all the cabin lights were finally out, so Heather made her way down to the lake, safe in the knowledge

that no one would be watching her. She had arranged to meet someone there at midnight, down by the water.

She held her watch up to a lamp fixed to the outside of one of the cabins. It would be another ten minutes or so before Mike was due to show.

Mike... Hmmm, buff.

Heather dropped her bag by the water's edge and started to unbutton her jeans.

A sound.

From behind her.

If Billy had followed her out the cabin, she would not be responsible for her actions. But when Heather looked round, she saw no one, so it had to be Mike, fooling around.

Heather called out: "Mike? Is that you?"

Nothing.

There were only a few outdoor lights around the camp; some bolted onto cabin walls, others hanging from cables and tall wooden posts, like the lights that ran down the length of the jetty.

But there were still plenty of places where someone could hide—still too many shadows.

Heather looked every which way, but saw no one. And when she looked out into the forest, all she could see was darkness. She knew Mike could be an asshole, but it was late and she was tired.

"If this is your idea of foreplay, I'm not impressed."

Still no reply.

"Alright, fuck you then. I'm heading in."

Heather removed her pink blouse to reveal a tight, naked body graced with shoulder-length strawberry blonde hair, then dived into the water of Crystal Lake.

***

At least another twenty minutes went by before Heather realized Mike was decidedly late.

While the fog swirled over her head and coiled its way into the trees of the forest, Heather had successfully managed to chill out,

alternating between swimming and simply floating on the temperate, relaxing water. But all the while, she had heard more strange sounds come from inside the trees. She was convinced it was Mike. He was being a total jerk. Fine. If he wanted to waste his time hiding in the woods trying to scare her, then it was his loss. He could be here, in the water, having fun; but no, he preferred to stay out in the forest, rediscovering the total loser within.

There it was again—that noise, like the breaking of a branch or some leaves or something.

"Mike!" she shouted. "Come on. It's not funny anymore.

It wasn't funny in the first place, but she was trying to be kind.

Still she got no answer. And for the first time that night. Heather grew nervous and just a little afraid.

Thinking about it, there she was... alone... naked in the water... at midnight, with no one else around. And all the while she was convinced that there was someone out there, in the woods, watching her, stalking her. What if Mike was a whacko?

Heather had had enough.

She quickly swam back to shore, where she hurriedly toweled herself down and threw on her blouse. The wet on her body made the thin fabric cling to her firm, moist breasts. She bent down to reach for her jeans, when another branch seemed to snap, somewhere nearby among the trees. Only this time, the sound was much louder, and much closer.

It couldn't be Mike.

Nervousness turned to fear. Darting her gaze in all directions, Heather decided to leave right now.

Wearing only her shirt, she grabbed her shoes, pants and bag and made for the safety of the nearest cabin—the last one she'd been to during lights-out. She could lock it from the inside and use the phone.

Another sound.

She turned, and noticed that her sudden movement had caused the mist to twirl and spiral all around her. She also noticed something else...

There...

Further back in the mist... a dark figure!

Now she was running.

A few seconds later and she was at the cabin door. She was about to enter when she decided to take another look back.

There was no one there.

I must be losing it.

Heather breathed a sigh of relief, and was now feeling more than a little stupid. She was a Camp Counselor. She knew how much wildlife there was in this region. Most animals will avoid direct human contact. She was being retarded.

Okay, crazytime's over.

She grabbed the handle of the cabin door and turned it.

Locked! Heather cursed under her breath. She had locked the damned thing herself, so she should have known.

She opened her bag, raised it towards the light and looked inside for the key. She couldn't see it, so she searched through the whole bag, then through her clothes, the breast pocket of her blouse...

"Shit."

The key was missing.

She knew she had it when she went down to the lake, so there was only one place it could be....

No way.

There was no way she was going back. Not now. Maybe if she could get one of the kids to open a window for her, she could climb through, then maybe sort things out in the morning.

Taking another quick look around her, and happy that she was alone, Heather nipped barefoot along to the cabin window nearest Billy's bed. Of all the kids most likely to still be awake, Billy was the one—what with his nightmares and everything. Heather was about to tap lightly on the window with her knuckles when....

Godammit!

Billy's head popped into view, his sudden appearance scaring Heather half to death. She really had been rattled by this whole thing.

"Billy." Heather was trying to sound calm, in control. "Can you open the window for—"

Billy gave her the finger!

He didn't even wait for Heather to finish her sentence. He just flipped her the bird, then went back to bed.

Heather could not believe it.

She was a Camp Counselor, she was much older than he was, she... she...

She had to go back and find the key.

The fog was closing in.

But she couldn't hear a thing, only the gentle lolling of the lake.

She had no choice.

It was just an animal or something.

Holding tight to her bag, Heather ran full-speed in the direction of the lake. She refused to let the trees and the eerie fog play with her imagination—and she felt extremely proud of herself when, after only a few moments, she found the key lying in the dirt close to the waterside.

Grinning with her success, Heather bent down to reach for the key... and saw two heavy black boots emerge from the mist right in front of her face.

Instantly, Heather was nauseous with fear, and her heart pounded with the beat of an unexpected shock—as if someone was punching her from inside her chest.

She didn't want to look, but she had to.

Almost by instinct, Heather raised her head and looked into a pair of eyes... staring out at her from a... a hockey mask. A man... huge, hulking, ragged and rotten. Easily way over seven foot tall. Broad, powerful.

Ohmigod...

What she could see of his head was deformed, misshapen. The bald skin was blackened, decayed, withered, rotted, and the skull was bulbous, almost mutated. A few long, fetid strands of straggly gray hair trailed down from a dead patch on the back of the man's head.

And when Heather looked into the dark, emotionless eyes inside the mask, she knew she was staring into the face of death.

This was Camp Crystal Lake.

This murderous behemoth was Jason Voorhees.

And Jason Voorhees was going to kill her!

***

The swinging machete blow almost took off Heather's head, but she ducked just in time, somehow able to over come at the very last minute the terror that had almost paralyzed her. It was sheer instinct that led to the blade slicing through Heather's hair instead of through her neck.

Heather screamed and started the flight for her life.

Blinded by panic, she ran out into the fog and, before she knew it, was soon headed into the forest; away from the lights, away from where that man—that *thing* with the machete—could see her.

Branches scratched at her bare legs, leaves whiplashed across her face, and her feet were cut by thorns and sharp stones, but she kept on running. Until finally, crying and scared, she tripped on a moss-covered tree root and fell flat on her face.

This couldn't be happening to her.

It couldn't be real.

Crracckk!

She got up and carried on running. She could hear him, like before by the lake. She could hear him breaking through the undergrowth. All she had to do was move away from the noise. All she...

Her face ran slap-bang into the tree.

She'd been so worried about what was behind her, that she never saw it coming. All the same, she felt relieved that it was a tree she'd run into, and not...

She turned.

Jason Voorhees!

No.

He stood right in front of her.

No.

She cried out.

It was pathetic, she was crying...

The machete plunged into her gut with such force that Heather fell straight back against the tree she'd run into. The blade of the

machete pierced through skin, through muscle, through intestine, through spine, through muscle, through skin, then out through the back of the fucking pine tree.

Jason had stabbed Heather with such force that he'd scooped the girl off her feet and pinned her up against the tree trunk.

Poor Heather just hung there, bolted to the trunk by Jason's machete, her feet dangling above the ground. Blood poured out of the gaping wound in her stomach, and ran down her legs until it was dripping down from her toes.

As Heather's life slowly ebbed away, she tried to lift her head. Her eyes crawled slowly upwards in their sockets, until her fading sight came to rest on the impassive white plastic of the hockey mask.

Then she was gone.

Jason stood for a moment.

He looked at the body.

Then he titled his head, and looked at it from another angle. There was something familiar about his victim.

But it was over.

Jason reached out to pull the machete free with one of his black-gloved hands, when he, too, found himself hearing a strange sound from somewhere within the mist-enshrouded woodland all around him.

He paused.

Looked around.

As Jason turned to see where the noise had come from, he failed to notice the head of Heather slowly rise up behind him. He did not see that the dead girl had somehow come back to life.

He certainly did not expect the dead girl to speak.

"I should have been watching them..." Heather's voice was gasping, unnatural, and her tone was more of spite than remorse.

"Not drinking!" she sneered. "Not meeting a boy at the lake."

Jason wheeled round to see who was talking, but it was not Heather he saw pinned to the tree by his machete. It was a different girl. It was someone else. Someone familiar.

This new talking corpse continued in the same theme as living-dead Heather. "I deserved to be punished," she said almost

contemptuously, before changing in front of Jason's very eyes into a dead young man.

"We all deserved to be punished," he moaned, before changing into another body, and another and another.

In moments, the body on the tree was constantly changing, constantly in flux, constantly shifting from one bloody young corpse into another: a young blonde-haired woman with an ice pick through the side of her head, a fat curly-haired chump in a wetsuit, a cute guy dressed in nothing but jeans, a hippie guy and his chick, a puny little fuck in a paintball outfit, a whole series of punks and gangbangers, teenagers, Camp Counselors, cops—all victims, victims whose voices seemed to blend, to merge in an undead chorus of guilt.

"We all deserved to be punished. For what we did to you... for what we did to your mother..."

Jason knew these people.

He had killed them all.

Every last one of them.

Unsure what to do next, Jason missed the figure creeping stealthily through the mist behind him.

Suddenly, Jason knew what to do. He had killed all these people once; now he would kill them all again.

Stirring into action at last, the brute withdrew his machete from the ghostly crowd-corpse. He was about to hack the shifting body into a dozen bloody pieces, when it completely dissipated into the mist.

Gone.

Heather was gone.

Dr Crews was gone. Creighton Duke was gone.

His victims.

They were all... gone

Jason stared at the tree. The hole made by his machete was still there. *So was the figure behind him.*

A hand reached out and tapped Jason on the back of his shoulder. The hand was wearing a glove, a glove with five razor-sharp knives bolted to the fingers.

Machete raised to kill, Jason spun sharply on his heels. But there was no one there.

Or was there?

Slowly, coming forward out of the mist... a woman...

Not a teenager. A woman.

She was familiar. Another victim?

No.

Familiar.

Her coarse, short gray hair. Her thick, heavily-knit sweater. Her strong, mature build.

Was she walking, or was she gliding through the mist?

He knew her.

"Jason..."

That voice!

"Jason. My special, special boy. Do you know what your gift is?"

It can't be!

"No matter what they do to you... you cannot die. You can never die."

She was right.

As Jason stood there—impassive, motionless—watching her, his mind was ablaze with the truth of her words, and suddenly his lives exploded before him. He had been stabbed, chainsawed, shot, hit with an axe, hanged, chopped across the face with his own machete, drowned, battered with a claw-hammer, electrocuted, set on fire, blown up, melted by poisonous chemicals, and... dragged down to Hell!

HELL!

Where was he?

What was he doing here?

"You've just been sleeping, honey. But the time has come to wake up. Mommy has something she wants you to do."

Mommy!

That face... That voice...

Jason was looking straight into the eyes of Pamela Voorhees, his mother!

It was she who had started all the murders at Crystal Lake. When two Camp Counselors let her son drown in 1957, because they were too busy necking and screwing, Pamela took out her mother's revenge on the whole damned camp. She killed the Counselors, killed them all.

When people tried to re-open the camp in the 1960s, she stopped them. First, she poisoned all the drinking water. When that failed, she resorted to arson and burned down some of the cabins. The police never found out who was responsible for all the trouble, and eventually the camp was closed. It stayed closed until 1980 when local do-gooder Steve Christy spent over twenty-five thousand dollars rebuilding the place. It took him over a year to get the camp ready again, but his project was doomed from the start. No sooner had the new Counselors showed up for work than Pamela Voorhees began to kill them.

Five, she cut up with a hunting knife; two, she pinned with arrows; and one, she dealt with by an axe-blow to the face. For his troubles, Steve Christy took a knife in the gut.

Soon, only one of the Counselors was left—Alice.

As Pamela chased the terrified teenager, she thought she could hear the voice of her poor drowned boy, Jason, urging her on to slaughter. But the voice Alice heard that night at Crystal Lake was Pamela's own: "Kill her, Mommy, kill her. She can't hide. No place to hide. Get her, Mommy, get her. Kill her... kill her... kill her... kill her... kill her... kill her... kill her!"

Pamela Voorhees was quite insane.

Finally, she cornered Alice on the shore by the lake. And it was there, in a moment of sheer desperation, that Alice took hold of a machete and hacked Pamela Voorhees's head clean off her shoulders. When Pamela's headless corpse hit the ground, blood spat forward and mingled with the sand.

But when the cops came to clean up the mess, they couldn't find the machete or Mrs Voorhees's head. Some of her clothes had gone missing too.

Jason had taken them.

He had seen the killing of his mother, had stolen her remains, and had taken them to his hovel shack in the heart of the forest, where he created a shrine in her sick memory.

From that day on, Jason lived alone, roaming the forests around Crystal Lake like a wild, savage beast, until the day came when the kids returned to the area, when he embarked upon his own reign of bloody vengeance. They had killed his mother; now he would kill them.

It was soon after the outsiders returned to Crystal Lake, that someone had tried to fool him. A girl. She'd tried to kill him. Tried to get near him by... by pretending to be his mother!

***

Thunder and lightning crashed over Crystal Lake, casting Jason and Pamela Voorhees into violent relief.

He merely stared as she smiled at him—at Jason, her beloved son.

Was she real?

Jason had lived through many deaths; perhaps his mother also was somehow alive beyond the grave. But Jason was not standing by Crystal Lake.

As even he himself had just dimly recalled, the last time Jason walked on Earth he had been pulled down to Hell. Even now, his real body lay resting in the dirt of the damned, while his spirit—his vile undead energy—existed here, in the illusory Crystal Lake of the abyss.

Jason had been good to Hell.

He had relentlessly, ceaselessly carried out his bloody killings time and time again. In return, Hell had been good to Jason, preserving his crushed lifeforce in this perpetual fantasy of homicide. Jason had butchered Heather over a thousand times, in a predictable, unyielding loop of machete wipeout. Only now, the loop had been broken. Another of Hell's most wretched servants had used what power remained to him, to break into Jason's mind, to break into his dreams...

As lightning flashed its brilliance across Jason's hockey mask a second time, Jason's real body, in its real unmarked grave, jolted into life.

Pamela Voorhees was triumphant. "Rise up, Jason! Your work isn't finished. Hear my voice and *live again!*"

Within the grave, the massive decomposed body of Jason Voorhees began to shake, to regenerate. Wounds and injuries began to heal. His black heart started to beat. He was somehow becoming stronger, younger, more vital, more powerful.

The two dead eyes inside the hockey mask flicked open.

This was no ordinary grave, with a casket and a neat six foot trench. Jason had been dragged to Hell. He had been buried alive, pulled down and down through layers of earth, and left to rot in the soil.

But now, as more strength returned to Jason, he started to claw his way up. Inch by inch, he fought his way up through the packed dirt, until at last his hand broke up through the surface.

And then the earth above him exploded, as Jason burst up out of his grave. Jason Voorhees had been reborn!

***

Back in the memory of Crystal Lake, Pamela Voorhees watched the spirit of her son fade away.

"Make them remember me, Jason," she called as her son vanished into life.

Pamela Voorhees—mother of eternal vengeance.

An evil grin crossed her face. She had sent Jason back. He would do as Mommy told him. He would kill everyone in his path to avenge her murder. It's a pity Jason was too stupid to realize that his Mom was long dead and was never coming back.

Once Jason had finally departed Crystal Lake, Mrs Voorhees's face began to melt away, the flesh dripping and withering almost as if beneath the heat of a blowtorch. And when "Pamela" next spoke, it was with the voice of Freddy Krueger!

"Make them remember what fear tastes like." He sniggered.

Suddenly Crystal Lake was gone.

In its place was the darkness again—the darkness Freddy was desperate to escape. And where once was the sound of the whispering waves of Crystal Lake, there were now only the cries of tortured souls.

All signs of Pamela Voorhees were gone.

Jason was back on Earth and the pretence was over.

But the game... the game had only just begun.

Freddy Krueger was now himself again—the hat, the razor glove and the striped sweater—and the fires of Hell blazed in Freddy's eyes as he looked beyond the darkness, and across the infernal wasteland surrounding him.

Everything was going to plan. All he had to do was move his pawn into position and then the final round could begin. Freddy thought about all the fresh souls he could look forward to swallowing.

"I've been away from my children too long," he brooded.

It was time for Jason Voorhees to go to work.

TWO

Rain poured down from the early evening sky. It was dark, and the water splashed on the tarmac of the road, where it formed puddles that reflected the streetlights and the beams from occasional passing cars. The road was lined with houses in the Colonial style; the lawns were long and well-kept, the vehicles parked out front were all less than three years old, and there was no gum on the sidewalk.

Welcome to suburban money central!

Thunderstorms were rare over the town of Springwood. Many of the older residents associated lightning storms with bad news, and tonight they were right.

When the blinding electricity flashed once more across the sky, it revealed the hulking, menacing figure of Jason Voorhees!

Where was he?

He had expected his mother to return him to Crystal Lake. That's what he always does, Jason goes home. But this was definitely not Crystal Lake. This was somewhere else. A town with cars, people, houses. He needed to find...

The lightning flashed once more.

He was standing by a signpost on the corner of the street.

He looked up.

Thunder boomed overhead.

The sign read: **ELM STREET.**

When the rumbling subsided, Jason heard a sound he knew very well. It was being carried to him on the wind of the storm. Jason cocked his head and heard the sound. of voices. Teenagers' voices.

***

"Okay—marry, fuck, or kill? Your choices are The Three Stooges."

Gibb had asked the party—game question, but The Three Stooges was just as good a way of describing Gibb and her two friends, Kia and Lori.

The three of them had been close since the beginning of Elementary School. They'd been through a lot over the years, and had shared some good times. But now that they were in their final term of High School, it was clear to Lori at least, that the three of them were growing further and further apart.

As each girl saw more of what life had to offer a young adult, they were making separate decisions that saw each of them moving off in different directions. A more positive viewpoint might be that the three of them formed a triangular yin and yang, and that it was their differences that had bound them together for so long. And certainly, right now, the strength of their mutual friendship was still more than enough to hold them together. But who could say whether they'd still be so close a few years down the road?

That was a question for the future; now, however, the girls were simply content to burn a few hours having fun round at Lori's place. The three of them sat by the coffee table in the newly decorated living room.

Just in case the other two had forgotten who The Three Stooges were, Gibb tried to make the question more clear "Larry, Moe or Curly?"

Kia frowned, wrinkling her nose. "Which one had the super-bad toupee hair?"

"Moe," replied Lori.

"I'd kill him."

If there was one thing Kia had no time for, it was fashion—crime. There was no reason not to look good, even on a budget—it just took a little bit of time and a little bit of pride. And Kia herself looked pretty much of her time and place, the copper-red streaks through her black hair perfectly complimenting her facial tones. Likewise, her clothes were totally street, yet with a clear ethnic slant, giving her a look that was contemporary yet somehow timeless. You got the impression that there was far more to Kia than met the eye.

With Gibb, on the other hand, what you saw is what you got. And what you got was an excitable kid in a red baseball cap, holding a beer. Everything about Gibb was a denim statement in *don't fuck with me*. But she loved Kia's answer: "Okay. Keep 'em coming, girl."

Which was harder than Gibb thought. It's easy deciding which of The Three Stooges you'd want to kill—that is, if you couldn't kill all of them—but come on, marry or fuck? Kia thought long and hard before managing a difficult sigh. "I guess I'd fuck the bald guy."

"Curly," added Lori.

Kia was still confused by the whole Stooges concept. "I thought the guy with the long hair was Curly."

"No, that was Larry," explained Lori.

Kia rolled her eyes. "Okay, whatever. I'd fuck the bald guy and I'd marry Larry. Jesus!" She stood up suddenly, pissed. "Is this what we're doing all night? 'Cause this is super-lame! I mean, your Dad's gone the whole weekend!"

Lori didn't need reminding.

Kia and Gibb were her best friends, but Lori couldn't help feeling uncomfortable. She didn't like it when her Dad went away. And she never knew where he went to she thought he worked local. She frowned, momentarily—hoped her friends didn't notice.

If anyone had more reason to feel out of the friendship right now, it was Lori. Four years ago, well... something had happened—something bad—and it had been a long time before Lori had been able to find the fun again. Kia and Gibb had helped her through her problems, but Lori still sensed that recent events had put her friendship with the two of them under a lot of strain. And the strain was still there, bubbling beneath the surface.

Lori was able to deal with this, she had to.

She had been through so much since moving to Elm Street, that she'd had to grow up faster than Gibb and Kia. She'd matured, become more independent. She'd developed a fierce inner strength, because if life had taught Lori anything, it was that when push comes to shove, we all have to deal with the tough things in life on our own.

Lori couldn't rely on her friends, she couldn't rely on her father, and she couldn't rely on...

Don't even think his name!

Lori was just seventeen and at first glance seemed like any other attractive young woman, but the green eyes framed by her flowing blonde hair betrayed a wisdom beyond her years, and every gentle

line on her beautiful face delineated the great strength of her character. Whatever it was that had happened to Lori, it had only made her stronger.

Gibb took the opportunity of Kia's tantrum to get up and walk over to the living room window. She now had a cigarette in her hand, along with her beer.

Lori was not impressed.

Sure, Gibb was going to smoke by an open window—the room wouldn't stink so much—but smoking was such a bad scene.

"Gibb, I thought you were gonna quit." Lori didn't mean to complain, but she felt she had to say something.

Gibb laughed and raised her beer. "I only smoke when I drink now."

Kia saw the flaw in the plan. "But you're always drinking."

"Yeah," smiled Gibb. "I gotta work on that next."

Gibb threw open the window and lit up.

Outside, the storm was in full throttle. Some of the rain started to blow in through the window, but somehow that only made the cigarette more satisfying. Gibb's tiny puff of nicotine fire was defying the elements.

"Alright, alright, alright," she said. "I got another one: Fred, Shaggy or Scooby?"

Despite herself, Kia had to laugh.

Lori just groaned. Fuck Scooby Doo? Gibb could have at least included Scrappy Doo for killing.

***

He had found the voices.

Soaked by the pouring rain, dazzled by the lightning, and buffeted by the wind, Jason Voorhees had homed in on the giggling female voices.

Suddenly the voices became louder, and he saw it—the house across the road.

A window had just been opened. Ground floor.

A girl was sitting there.

She was holding a cigarette.

Smoking is bad for your health.

She would be the first to die.

***

There was no way that Kia was going to waste a single second of her time on choosing a cartoon character to marry. Screw the dumb game! Besides, she had more urgent matters on her mind; she opened up her compact and started to adjust her make-up.

"Do you guys think I should get a nose job?"

Lori groaned. Which magazines had Kia been looking at this time?

Gibb moaned but for quite a different reason. "Why?" she asked, half-serious, half clowning. "So you can steal even more of the guys I'm interested in?"

Kia was about to answer, but was drowned out by a sudden clap of thunder. The heart of the storm was almost overhead now.

Gibb blew more smoke out through the open window.

Lori was becoming annoyed. It was dumb to open a window during a storm. If she...

The lights in the living room dipped, flickered, then were good again.

"Maybe I should get some candles," suggested Lori. If she expected some kind of support for this common sense course of action... well, she knew her friends better.

"What we need," countered Gibb, finishing the last drop of her drink, "is more beer."

The way Gibb saw it, the lights were good. They'd dimmed, that's all. Not bad. Lori could fix it while Gibb was gone getting the brewskis.

"You guys want anything?" she asked. "I'm gonna make a run."

She flicked her cigarette butt out the window.

***

Where it struck Jason Voorhees square in the middle of his hockey mask, then bounced dully off to the ground.

Tiny red sparks floated down around Jason's head as he tightened his grip on the machete.

Jason was standing right outside the house now. He looked at the door. Wooden panels painted yellow. Two slender columns stood, one each side of the door, supporting the roof of the portico where Jason could see the number of the house.

Four numbers.

Decorative. Screwed on tight.

1—

4—

2—

8.

Lori lived at 1428 Elm Street—the house where Marge Thompson had died, the house where Nancy Thompson had fought Freddy Krueger and survived, the house of a thousand nightmares, the house at the heart of a mystery the people of Springwood had spent over forty years trying to forget.

Lori lived at 1428 Elm Street, and after tonight her life would never be the same again.

***

Gibb picked up her car keys and headed out of the living room into the hallway.

"Should you be driving?" Lori called after her.

"Please. I'm totally under the limit."

Gibb opened the front door, only to see someone standing there.

"Surprise!"

It was Trey, and he had that guy Blake with him. They were both cowering under the portico from the rain. Trey lifted his hand—he was holding a twelve-pack of beer. Talk about timing!

"Trey," Gibb beamed. "You answered my prayers." She took the beer from her boyfriend's hand and went to him, but he pushed her away, with a look of disgust on his face.

"Babe!" he complained. "What have I told you about kissing me after you've smoked, huh?"

"Lighten up! They were menthols!"

Gibb liked Trey—she liked him a lot—but that didn't stop Trey being totally pointless when he started with the hygiene thing. He would go way beyond rational on this.

Trey leaned forward, and grinned slyly. "I brought Blake." He nodded back over his shoulder in the direction of his friend. "So where's Linda?"

Gibb hushed him. "It's *Lori*. And this is her house, so don't be a total cocksmith."

Whatever.

Trey pushed past Gibb and strode into the house where he guessed all the action was. Blake strutted in behind. him, and gave Gibb his best shot at a smile while sipping from a silver hip flask he kept in his jacket. If Gibb didn't know better, she'd say Blake was a total poser.

Which is pretty much how Lori felt.

As soon as the two slicksters entered her living room, she smiled, grabbed hold of Kia and whispered, "Did you know they were coming over?"

Kia didn't care who heard her reply. "Hey, we knew you were just gonna sit here alone all night. You need to meet a guy! And..." she winked, "Blake's cute."

"He's not my type."

Blake and Trey were like two hyperactive clothes-racks in need of a fire.

"Who is?" snapped Kia. "No one's ever gonna live up to the fuzzy memory of your first love, okay? You were fucking *fourteen*, Lori. Get over it! It's called puppy love."

Kia was being tough, but Lori knew her friend meant well.

"Look, we were young," Lori admitted. "But what Will and I had was real."

"Really? Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't Mr Real just drop-kick your ass without so much as a goodbye handshake?" Lori said nothing, leaving Kia to forge on with the sermon. "He ever call or write to you after he moved? Maybe send you an e-mail?"

Again, no reply.

Kia was right, but Lori wasn't prepared to admit it. She couldn't reconcile her knowledge, her memory of Will with the way things had ended. Will had just vanished out of her life, even though that wasn't the kind of thing Will would ever do. And he'd taken off just when Lori needed him most, just when Lori's Mom...

Kia hadn't known Will like Lori had but, at the end of the day, Will wasn't around. Kia was right.

"You see my point?" said Kia. "It's time to leave the convent, Lori. You need. To meet. A guy." At which point she nodded over to Blake. Lori followed suit, just in time to see Blake reach down into his pants and adjust his package.

Oh great.

***

The electric lamps continued to cut in and out all evening, so Lori had finally gone and fetched some candles from the utility room. She wasn't sure they were really necessary, but it kept her busy... and out of Blake's way.

Trey and Gibb had put on some music, and were all over each other on one of the sofas in the living room.

Kia was waiting for Lori to start noticing Blake, but Lori was preoccupied with putting the candles down. She was just putting another candle in place when Blake called over to her.

"I like the flow of your place. Got good feng shui. You know about feng shui?"

"You should see her bedroom. Great flow in there," Kia chimed a bit too eagerly. "Lori? Why don't you go upstairs and let Blake see your feng shui?"

Lori shot Kia the dirtiest look, when suddenly there was a deafening crack of thunder and all the lights finally gave up the ghost.

Kia tutted quietly to herself.

Lori was right again.

She struck a match and started to light the candles. She didn't think the power would come back any time soon.

Lori put one of the lit candles near the love-hungry couple, but Trey abruptly stood up. He looked knowingly at Gibb and said, "C'mon. I got a kink in my neck. You can give me a massage."

Gibb smirked back. "I think I need a couple more drinks before there's gonna be any… massaging."

Trey didn't see the joke. He was nursing a hard-on that could knock a hole in a fence, and in true hot-blooded style was growing mightily impatient. "Babe? Don't make me ask you twice, okay?"

Then he got up and headed off upstairs, expecting Gibb to fall in close behind.

Lori didn't get it.

"What do you see in him?" she asked.

"You mean *besides* a really cute ass?" smiled Gibb. Then she picked up a couple of beers, took a lit candle from Lori's hand and went off upstairs after her guy.

Blake watched Lori intently. He hoped she might be inspired by Gibb's example. He was nursing a hard-on as well.

Lori watched Gibb drift out of the room, and shook her head. It was going to be a long night.

THREE

By the time Gibb got to the bedroom, Trey had already taken off his clothes and folded them all neatly on a chair. Everything was tidy and precise.

It was Dr Campbell's bedroom, Lori's Dad's room. The room had a good sized double bed, but the decor clearly lacked a woman's touch.

Gibb put the candle down on a nightstand by the side of the bed, then started to pull back the sheets.

"Hey!" barked Trey. "What are you doing? Those sheets are probably filthy. Just pull back the comforter... we'll just lay on top, okay?"

That damned hygiene thing again.

Gibb was not impressed. "God, you're a freak."

***

The atmosphere was just as awkward downstairs, only the people in the living room weren't going to have all the hassle made worthwhile by a long satisfying screw. Instead, the three of them just sat there in silence.

Blake still felt he could make the feng shui angle work for him. I mean, come on, it made him sound so deep.

"So, Lori," he said. "Am I gonna get that grand tour?"

"Why don't you start in the kitchen?" she replied, bored. "And get us a beer while you're in there."

Blake didn't smell the condescension. He was only too glad to be of service. The way he saw it, he was slowly breaking Lady-Lori's ice. He shot Lori what he thought was a sexy nod, then got up to go play fetch.

"He's a total foolio, Kia. Get him out of here."

"Oh come on, just give him a chance!"

"I don't like him."

"You don't like anybody! I mean, you've barely gone out since—"

Lori cut her off. "Since what? My Mom died? Look, my Dad needs me, okay? I can't just go out all the time with guys. And if I did, it wouldn't be with someone like Blake."

***

Although they were talking about him, Blake's ears were not burning. He'd drunk too much booze from his hip flask to be at all sensitive to anything. He didn't even notice that the back door was open. Nor did he spot the wet puddle on the floor, just inside the doorway. He just stumbled into the kitchen with his candle.

Blake threw open the fridge door and grabbed some beers. The refrigerator door was tall, the height of a man.

He closed it. And that was when a gust of howling wind blew his candle out.

Oh man!

Blake felt the draft on his hand and followed it to the open door.

It was dark.

Slowly, he walked across the kitchen floor until he reached the back door... and closed it.

When he got back into the living room, there was a pause between tracks on the CD, and he could hear the distant sighs and moans of Trey and Gibb screwing from upstairs. Lucky bastard.

Trey had told him Gibb always liked to be on top.

Lucky, lucky bastard.

He put the beers on the table.

"Your back door was open," he told Lori flatly. "I closed it."

He didn't notice the curious look Kia and Lori gave each other, just kept thinking about the action going on upstairs.

***

Trey was done.

He and Gibb had finished their high beats-per-minute screw, and were lying side by side, indulging in what some textbooks call the intimacy stage.

Gibb leaned over to cuddle him. Her smile was incredibly sexy, the kind of smile that could arouse almost any man. But Trey had finished. He'd shot his load, and it was over.

"Babe. You know I don't like to be touched after, okay?"

There he goes again with the freak thing!

Gibb angrily sat up and got out of bed. She should have been used to this by now, but she wasn't. He still pissed her off. Was he incapable of sharing? It was as if making love was some kind of function for him. Like taking a leak. Didn't it mean anything at all?

Gibb grabbed the comforter, wrapped it around herself and headed for the bedroom door, shaking her head. "Fine. I'm taking a shower."

"Good," Trey mumbled, "your hair smells like menthols."

You bastard, Trey.

Gibb took the candle and walked along to the bathroom, leaving the self-satisfied asshole to stretch on the bed in darkness.

Trey heard the shower come on.

Whaddaya know. *Left her beer behind*.

He rolled over onto his stomach, and stretched a hand out to reach for the beer. It was pretty dark, but he could just see the...

LIGHTNING!

What the...

Crystal sharp in the white flash, Jason Voorhees was standing next to the bed, towering over the naked sprawling body of Hygiene Boy.

No please no...

Trey gasped as he saw Jason raise the machete, but he had no time to speak or cry out before the blade came down and drilled right through his body, and through the bottom of the mattress of Lori's father's bed.

Blood and springs burst through the bottom of the bed, and Trey's body spasmed and writhed as Jason twisted the machete in Trey's guts, before finally withdrawing the offal-smeared weapon.

"Trey?"

Gibb was calling from the shower. She thought she had heard something. Trey wasn't leaving, was he?

Jason paused. He looked down at the gutted youth with detached fascination—the voice from the other room could wait until...

What was that?

Trey's finger twitched. It was the twitch of a death nerve, and it triggered a further angry onslaught from the maniacal juggernaut.

Jason would not permit anything to live, anything to breathe, or anything to move!

Voorhees put the machete aside, then took hold of both ends of the bed frame in his powerful hands. He then folded the bed in half, collapsing the metal and wooden frame on Trey's body, crushing him, silencing him forever.

The joints in Trey's body popped and snapped as his bones were broken, were compressed into the bloody flesh of the boy's remains. Jason had squashed this living being with all his life ahead of him—into meat. He had crushed his victim into mangled flesh. He had broken him.

Trey's finger stopped moving.

He was the first victim of Jason on Elm Street.

***

"Trey? What the hell are you doing?"

Gibb had turned off the water, and was listening intently. She could sense that Trey was up to something.

Dripping wet, and increasingly annoyed, Gibb stepped out of the shower and wrapped a soft white towel around her body.

What was the idiot playing at?

She left the candle behind her, and went back into the bedroom. Trey hadn't found another candle. It was still dark in there.

Gibb slipped on a pool of something wet, her bare feet completely losing their grip, and in a moment she was flat on her ass.

"What the fuck?!"

And then the power returned.

Gibb was sitting in a pool of blood.

Not just blood. It was thick. It was sticky. There were other fluids mixed in there. Fluid, and bits of...

She looked up...

Towards the bed...

Where Trey's smashed face and pulverized remains glistened among the broken bedstead, like some kind of fucked up slaughterhouse sandwich.

***

Wrapped only in her blood-soaked towel, Gibb came tearing down the stairs and bolted straight out of 1428 Elm Street, screaming loud enough to wake the dead. She didn't care about the storm. She didn't care about the rain. She didn't care that she was barefoot and naked save for the bloody white towel.

And Kia, Lori and Blake soon followed her.

Screaming.

They had gone upstairs to see what had happened. They had gone up into Dr Campbell's bedroom and seen the body.

The four of them ran in blind terror, desperate to escape whoever or whatever it was that had violated and murdered their friend.

It was Kia who first caught sight of the patrol car. But even her brain was on hold when she ran straight out in front of it and waved her arms.

Deputy Stubbs immediately hit the lights, and sounded one wail of his siren before braking to a halt alongside the devastated foursome. He didn't like the look of Gibb—nude, towel, bloodstains—he didn't like the look of her one bit.

"You kids need some… assistance?" he asked guardedly.

Gibb held up her bloody hands and screamed, "The fuck do you think?!"

***

The black coroner's van pulled up outside 1428 Elm Street. A few cars from the Springwood PD, including the Sheriff's own, were already at the scene of the crime, and the whole front of the house had been cordoned off by yellow and black police tape.

On the lawn just inside the cordon, police officers were questioning Lori, Kia, Gibb and Blake. Outside the tape barrier,

concerned neighbors looked on, and a local news crew had just arrived to capture all the action.

Gibb was a mess.

She hadn't stopped crying since seeing the horrifying remains of her boyfriend. Her eyes were glassy and rimmed with red. She still had some of Trey's blood on her arms, from when she'd fallen over on the bedroom floor. One of the officers had draped his black jacket over her shoulders, but she was still mostly dressed in the blood stained towel—a grim reminder of what she had just been through.

Oh God.

She could see him now... Trey... being carried out to the coroner's van in a body-bag by two medics.

The whole thing... it was like a nightmare.

Lori felt so sorry for her friend. Sure, Lori herself had never seen eye-to-eye with Trey, but Gibb was crazy about him and that was all that mattered.

Something caught Lori's attention.

She looked away from Gibb and stared across to the open door to her house. Sheriff Williams was stepping out onto the porch; he looked concerned.

He was talking to one of his men, Officer Goodman. There was something odd about the way the two of them were behaving. Goodman looked nervous, while the Sheriff spoke to him in hushed tones—they didn't want anybody to overhear them.

Lori strained to hear what Sheriff Williams was saying.

"We have to lock this down now," he hissed. "Keep it contained. You hear me?"

Lori couldn't hear all Officer Goodman's reply, but the longer he spoke, the more rattled and louder his voice became.

"...killed in bed. Jesus, it's even the same damn house. 1428 Elm. Gotta be him, right? Gotta be Freddy K—"

Williams dragged the officer to one side. "Hey! Don't even say that sonofabitch's name out loud. Let's keep it together. We've been through too much to let this thing spread now."

Lori didn't understand. Did they know who did this? If they did, why should they want to hide it?

"Freddy? Who's Freddy?" she asked.

Williams stopped dead in his tracks.

God damn it

Lori stared at him, waiting for an answer to her question. Blake shuffled along beside her, also waiting to hear what Sheriff Williams had to say.

"What the hell are they doing here?" barked Williams, exasperated.

Then he turned on his big-mouthed officer, and pulled him close. Making sure no one could hear him, the Sheriff pushed his face right into Goodman's and hissed, "I want all these kids brought down to the station. Keep 'em separate. Do it now."

Heck, the last thing Williams needed was another Krueger episode. The fucking maniac's dead. Why do these kids keep bringing his name back? Why won't they just let the past lie?

And—come to think of it—why, when anything happened, did it always happen at this damn house?

Williams had been with the department all his life, and the things he had seen had left a whole mess of lines on his aging features. But Springwood was his town, and most of the time he felt in control of it. Things only ever seemed to go wrong any time someone dialed 911 and called his people out to 1428 Elm.

Didn't Lieutenant Thompson used to live here once?

Williams sighed.

He wasn't going to lose control again. Not to a bunch of drugged-out kids. Not this time.

***

It was a few hours later before the parents of Gibb, Kia and Blake came to fetch their kids from the police station. All three were in shock, and had been given plenty of strong, sweet coffee. They were then wrapped in blankets before being led out of the building.

So far, the investigation had followed normal routine: the witnesses had been questioned, and the forensic team had scoured the crime scene for clues. It was natural to question witnesses

individually, so that they could not contaminate one another's statements. However, on this occasion Sheriff Williams had other reasons for questioning each of the kids separately.

There was only one of them left to talk to: the girl who'd asked him about Freddy Krueger. Lori. Lori Campbell. She actually lived at that place.

Maybe when all this was done, Williams could arrange for a compulsory house purchase by the County, and have the damned house demolished.

The girl was still in the interrogation room. It was just off the bustling main hallway and was easily visible through a row of large soundproof windows lining the wall.

Officer Goodman had just finished collecting Lori's statement, and was coming out of the interrogation room. He closed the door behind him. Williams watched Lori for a moment before going to Goodman for an update.

"So?"

"She doesn't know anything. None of 'em do. I'm pretty sure we're good."

Williams was conscious of the fact that Lori was looking at him through the glass window. But she couldn't hear anything.

"Pretty sure? You better be damn sure none of these kids know anything or I'll send your ass up to Westin Hills with them."

A voice from behind them cut in: "What do you mean? Know what?"

It was Deputy Stubbs, the cop Kia had waved to a halt on Elm Street.

Williams and Goodman exchanged glances, before Williams lightened up and turned to Stubbs with a smile.

"You did a good job tonight, Stubbs. Right place, right time. But let us take it from here."

Stubbs was puzzled. Take what from where?

The handsome young deputy was fairly new to the Springwood area, but he knew all the ins and outs of standard police procedure, and he couldn't see why the Sheriff should want to cut him out on something.

Stubbs looked through the interrogation room window, at one of the girls—Lori, was it?—sitting alone. She was still wearing the same tight pale sweater and jeans she'd worn when he almost ran her friend over.

Like all good cops, Deputy Stubbs suddenly had a hunch.

Leaving the Sheriff, he leisurely walked over to the water cooler, filled up a disposable foam cup.

He looked across the room.

Good—Sheriff Williams wasn't paying him any more attention.

Careful again not to make any loud or sudden movement, Stubbs stepped across the busy hall and quietly let himself into the interrogation room. He made sure to close the door after him.

Lori sat there at the table, shocked, depressed, frightened, head down.

"Your father's on his way," Stubbs said.

He handed Lori the cup of water.

"He asked us to keep you here until he gets here. Is there... anything I can do for you?"

Lori looked up and stared him in the eye.

"Do they know who did this?" she asked.

Though the reality was that he was unsure, Stubbs had to play this one carefully.

"I don't think so," he replied.

"But I thought I heard one of the officers say a name," said Lori. "Freddy something?"

Stubbs's hunch was coming good. The girl had told him something Williams hadn't. But the deputy had to be careful. The girl was in shock, she could be a loose cannon. He had to walk the fine line, play it straight. But when he opened his mouth, the words just seemed to spill out. He couldn't lie to those intelligent green eyes.

"Truth is," he said, "I just moved here a month ago. If they suspect someone, they haven't let me in on it yet.

Something about this touched Lori. She'd felt that the man who'd questioned her—Officer Goodman—was almost working against her in some way. And the Sheriff why was he so hard on her and her friends? Why were they being treated this way? But this cop—the new guy maybe he could help her.

"They asked me all kinds of weird questions," she said. "About my dreams. Why did—"

Lori was interrupted by someone knocking on one of the interrogation room windows. It was Sheriff Williams. He looked pretty annoyed. Williams waved Stubbs out into the hallway. He didn't want the deputy anywhere near that Elm Street kid.

Stubbs smiled reassuringly at Lori, and quickly made her a heartfelt promise. "I'm real sorry. I'll look into it for you, though. Don't worry. Everything's gonna be fine. We'll get who did this."

But the moment Stubbs was outside the room, and on the other side of the soundproof glass, Lori saw Sheriff Williams chew the poor guy's ass right up, big time!

Lori yawned. She was tired.

It was nowhere near her normal bed4time, but the stress had taken its toll. Her mind needed time to recover. And maybe sleep could block all the images circling through her head—of Trey's face pouring with blood, his jaw broken, his teeth biting into his upper lip.

Lori started to drift off.

No.

She wanted to see what was happening between the Sheriff and Deputy Stubbs.

Fighting back another yawn, she rubbed her eyes, took a sip of the cold water Stubbs had brought her, then looked up.

The two police officers had gone. They must have walked out of view along the corridor or something.

Lori decided to put the downtime to good use. She tried to remember everything she'd heard the Sheriff say outside her house.

She had to think. Remember.

Lori put her head down on the table and tried to concentrate.

"What was the name? What did he say?"

She yawned again.

"Freddy. He said it was Freddy something."

But what?

This was crazy. She had to know what was going on. Maybe Stubbs could help her. Or maybe she should just come right out with it and demand that Sheriff Williams tells her everything he knows.

God, she was tired.

Maybe she should stretch her legs.

She stood up and took a couple of steps. She was tired of waiting for something to happen. Lori made up her mind, and walked out of the interrogation room.

"Hello?" she called. "Deputy Stubbs?"

No reply.

Fine, I'll just keep trying until someone does reply.

Hold on...

Where is everyone?

Lori walked down the long hallway of the police station, but it seemed as if she was all alone in the place. Just a few moments ago there'd been people here, standing, talking, police officers. Now there was no one about.

She gripped her forehead and brushed her fingers through her hair, tried to work it out. Her friends had gone home, her Dad hadn't shown yet, and presumably most of the cops still working were searching for clues over at her house on Elm Street. Yes, that must be it. And Stubbs was probably with Williams in the Sheriff's office—so that the two of them could argue in private.

Right. That was it.

All she had to do was find Williams's office. That's where they'd be.

Lori set off down the hall, her footsteps echoing along the empty corridor.

A gentle breeze blew in from somewhere. It brushed alongside her, stirring the sheets of paper that were tacked to the walls. Lori hadn't noticed the papers before. They were all Missing Person sheets, each sheet bearing a name and a monochrome photo portrait—the details of someone who had gone missing. There were dozens of these sheets, and they all showed children.

My God. So many kids…

Then she heard it. It sounded like a whimper—from the other side of the station.

Drip.

What was that?

Drip drip.

Lori's eyes widened with fear. She could see red drops—blood?—falling to the floor a few feet ahead of her.

She looked up at the ceiling, but it was clear—no blood. And now she could see that the blood drops were leading away from her, down the corridor. Surely, the killer hadn't struck again? He couldn't have. Not in the police station. But where were the drops coming from?

Curiosity overcame fear, and Lori decided to follow the gruesome trail of blood wherever it might lead her. She hurried down the hall, listening to the dripping sound, watching the glistening red drops on the polished wood floor.

And as Lori walked quickly on by, every single child's face in every single Missing Person photo on the walls turned to watch her. The flat black and white portraits swiveled in unison—their eyes following Lori as she hurried past—all except one…

The photo on the last Missing Person sheet had no face. The photo was empty. The face of the very last child was missing.

FOUR

Lori heard another whimper. She didn't know the missing kids were watching her, and suddenly she found herself trying to locate the sound of that voice rather than the origin of the blood drops.

Another whimper. It came from just round the corner of the hallway. Which was precisely where the trail of blood was headed...

The fluorescent strip lights overhead seemed to be working at full strength, but somehow there were shadows along the corridor.

Lori found herself pausing to take a deep breath before peeking her head to see round the corner. But whatever it was Lori expected to see, or whatever it was she feared, she did not expect to see a little girl, crying with her head in her hands.

The girl stood halfway down the corridor, with her back to Lori. She wore a pretty white dress, and had sandy colored shoulder-length hair. She couldn't have been more than eight years old.

What the heck was she doing here so late? Why wasn't anybody looking after the poor kid?

Lori's fear was gone in an instant, and she ran forward to help the little girl.

"Are you okay?" asked Lori.

The girl said nothing. She just sobbed.

Lori was with her now. She bent and placed a gentle hand on the crying girl's shoulder.

The girl turned to face Lori. And she wasn't crying anymore.

Lori screamed!

The girl... she had no eyes—they'd been stabbed out. A vertical cut—a slash—ran down through the center of each empty bloody eye socket, starting above the brow and ending just below the lower eyelid. The eyes were a deep red mess.

Who could have done such a horrible thing?

Despite her shock, despite her fear, Lori noticed tiny flecks of rust embedded in the wounds, almost as if someone had attacked the girl with an old knife.

Someone had done this to her.

Someone had taken a knife to the little girl's face, turned her into a real live doll.

Drip drip.

Oh God, no!

The trail of blood spots Lori had been following had fallen from the girl's ripped-up eyes. The blood trickled from her two gaping wounds like tears of pain, only to fall slowly to the floor at the girl's tiny feet.

Lori stifled back a sudden gut-rush of puke.

"His name is Freddy Krueger," said the blind girl flatly. "And he loves children. Especially little girls."

What was going on?

What was this?

How did the girl know who this Freddy was? Why won't the Sheriff do something?

Lori wanted to help, but found herself backing away from the girl in terror. But the girl, even without her eyes, merely turned and looked Lori in the face:

"Freddy's coming back. Soon he'll be strong enough. It's okay to be afraid. We were all afraid. Warn your friends. Warn everyone."

Behind Lori was a large wall-mounted map of Springwood on which were tacked a number of Wanted posters and crime scene photographs.

The little girl took a step forward, causing Lori to step back involuntarily.

And again.

Soon, Lori was almost pressed up against the police map.

***

Only it wasn't a map anymore.

It was the door to her home: 1428 Elm Street.

Something touched her head.

Blood.

Lori ran forward with a scream and turned to see blood seeping through the tight gap between the white doorframe and the top of the painted yellow door.

Then the blood began to run. To flow. It poured down, and soon the entire front door of her house had turned red beneath the liquid sheet of fresh blood.

"*One, two, Freddy's coming for you…*"

Where the hell was she? This was her home, she was sure of it but it looked different: older, dirty and decrepit, all boarded up.

"*Three, four, better lock your door…*"

And the door was covered with blood.

"*Five, six, grab your crucifix…"*

Lori found it hard to believe this place was her home—it looked terrifying. There was no way she was going to go back in there. What had the police done to it?

"*Seven, eight, gonna stay up late*."

That singing!

Lori turned round and…

There were graves… tombstones… memorial slabs… stone crosses… headstones… graves… all over her front lawn! And on the neighbor's lawn. And across the street.

Lori gasped.

Every house on Elm Street had been turned into a graveyard.

"*Nine, ten, never sleep again*."

Playing on the graves of 1428 Elm Street were three pretty young girls wearing their finest white satin party dresses, their hair clean and immaculate. No girls dressed like this anymore; they all looked like something from an old photo album.

Two of the girls held on to the opposite ends of a jump rope, and they twirled it over and over while the third girl stood between them and jumped over the rope.

Over and over, the rope cut through the air.

But that thing… that rhyme they were singing…

Freddy's coming for you?

What Freddy?

"*Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha…*"

What was that?

Lori didn't think she could be any more afraid until she heard that laugh—low, guttural, evil…

What was happening to her?

The children carried on playing jump-rope as if they hadn't heard a thing. But Lori had heard it and...

A man rushing towards her from across the street...

Gone.

Lori thought she'd seen...

Even closer... he wore a red and green sweater and a snap-brimmed hat...

Gone.

Was Lori going crazy?

She rubbed her eyes and looked again.

He was running across the lawn... his face was all burned and disfigured... and his hand... he had knives for fingers...

Gone.

What the hell?

HE WAS RIGHT IN HER FACE!!!

Freddy Krueger shoved his ugly mouth right up into Lori's face and said...

"*Boo*."

***

Lori fought and waved her arms, but someone was holding her, trying to grab her. She lashed out, hit back.

"Are you alright?" Stubbs asked.

What? Lori stopped. Opened her eyes.

Deputy Stubbs.

She was still in the interrogation room. But the hallway, and the little girl? What was happening to her?

"I was just gonna turn these lights down," said Stubbs, "so you could get some sleep, but..."

Stubbs had already placed his jacket over Lori's shoulders while she'd been asleep.

Asleep. In the interrogation room.

Lori had been dreaming.

She'd had a nightmare.

She sighed, relieved. "That's okay. I think I'll stay awake and wait for my Dad to get me."

But Lori was soaking with sweat. Her dream had been so real, she could remember every second of it. Though what could she expect after what had happened tonight?

She must still be in shock.

Still, there was something about that dream…

She had no intention of going back to sleep that night.

***

Her friends were having trouble getting to sleep too.

While Lori sat huddled in Deputy Stubbs's jacket in the interrogation room of the police station, Blake was sat on the porch swing in front of his house almost halfway across town.

What a shitty evening!

Trey had been Blake's best friend. Blake couldn't believe it. He just couldn't deal.

No one knows who done the damn thing. No one saw who did it. No one saw anything. Not even Gibb.

Blake was so lost in his thoughts, replaying those last few minutes in his mind—Gibb running down the stairs; him, Kia and Lori going up to look at the body—that he didn't hear his father open the front door and come out to join him.

"Blake," his Dad said. "We have to talk."

Blake didn't even look up. He just stared blankly ahead, leaving his father to stand. So his father tried a more direct approach.

"What the hell were you doing over there? You were supposed to be watching your sister. Were you drinking?"

That caught Blake's attention alright, but all it did was annoy the hell out of him.

"My best friend was just killed, Dad. So how about giving me some fucking space?"

His father just stared at him, and they both froze in uncomfortable silence. There was no point arguing with the boy, not while he was

still upset. Blake's Dad shrugged his shoulders and went back indoors. Blake just needed some time.

But Blake was pissed. He couldn't believe how fucked up his Dad was. Always on his case with his fucked-up petty fucking rules.

Blake pulled out his silver flask. He'd been hitting the liquor pretty hard since arriving at Lori's house. Now, he drained the last numbing drops of the strong alcohol.

He was already drunk.

That was how he'd found it so easy to tell Dad to GO FUCK HIMSELF.

But now... now that the flask was empty, Blake had only one thought in his head.

"I'm gonna get him for you, Trey," he drawled, holding the empty flask up towards the heavens, in solemn intoxication.

"The cop let it slip... Somebody named Freddy. I'm gonna take him out myself, Trey. Swear to God."

The flask slipped from his hand and fell onto the ground. He was about to pick it up when he heard a rustling sound come from behind the bushes over on the side of the yard.

"Who's that?"

More rustling.

"Someone there?"

Blake waited and watched.

The bushes moved again. There was definitely someone there. There was definitely someone hiding in the bushes.

Maybe the psycho had followed him. The psycho could be coming after all of them, not just Trey. He could be stalking all the kids, like some dumb-fuck from a horror movie.

Well, if the sick sonofabitch was coming after Blake, he'd just made a big mistake.

Blake braced himself, then started to walk slowly over towards the bushes.

"If that's you Freddy, I'm gonna kick your ass."

His words said one thing, but his voice said completely the opposite.

"Baaa!"

What the…

Blake whipped round to see a goat standing in front of the porch where he'd just been.

A goat?

A fucking goat in Springwood? In the middle of the night?

Blake would have laughed if the goat's white beard hadn't been stained with blood.

"Jesus!"

Then he heard the laugh.

Although he couldn't possibly know it, Blake was hearing the very same laugh that Lori had just heard in her dreams.

And Blake could see the same nightmare figure Lori had seen in nightmare flashes. He was standing across the street, nothing more than a silhouette of a man in a funny hat, a shadow…

A shadow that stretched across the street, reached over the road and slid along the ground like oil, until it reached Blake's feet!

Blake's Dutch courage suddenly deserted him, and he turned to run…

Headlong into the jet silhouette of Freddy Krueger. Krueger's shadow lashed out with the razor glove.

Blake screamed as the five dark blades tore at his chest… only to pass right through!

No pain. No tearing. Nothing.

It was as if Blake had been attacked by a ghost—or a shadow.

"I'm okay," he laughed in amazement. "I'm not hurt!"

Freddy was enraged. His shadow wavered, became insubstantial.

"Not strong enough yet," he growled. "But I will be soon enough. Until then…"

Krueger's black outline dissipated into thin air, leaving behind only an echo of the completed threat.

"Let Jason have some fun."

***

"Agghhh!"

Blake woke up on the porch swing with a scream. The empty flask was still in his hand.

Ohmygodohmygodohmygod.

His chest was fine. No wounds. He was okay. It was just a dream.

A fucking dream!

Why didn't his Dad wake him up?

His Dad?

Blake's father was sitting beside him on the swing. But Blake had seen him go indoors—or did he dream their argument as well?

No. Their fight was real.

His Dad must have come out and sat beside him while he'd been asleep.

Dreaming about goats!

Way weird!

Blake sat forward. He regretted shouting at his Dad earlier. It was the booze.

Blake wanted to apologize, but he didn't know how to start.

Clearly the old guy was waiting for Blake to make the first move, because he hadn't said a thing since Blake woke up.

Blake gently nudged his father on the arm.

His father's head pitched sideways, and tumbled down into Blake's lap. He had been decapitated.

Blake screamed out in horror, his eyes locked on the fresh red stump of his Dad's broken neck. White bone lay within, surrounded by a ragged mess of soft, glistening flesh. He could feel the cold, moist weight of the freshly severed head on his lap.

Blake sprang up and ran towards the street, letting his father's head fall and roll along the porch.

Blake knew the answer.

It's a dream, it's only a fucking dream.

Ahead of him were the bushes he saw moving in his nightmare.

Wake up! Gotta wake up!

Dad!

Blake ran... straight into the arms of Jason Voorhees. The butcher raised the machete high above his head.

Blake whimpered, "Freddy?"

The machete came down and lopped Blake's booze addled head straight off his shoulders in one clean powerful swipe. Blake's mouth screamed noiselessly, as his head went flying through the air, before squelching to a thud near the porch swing. Two severed heads looked each other in the face.

Like father, like son.

FIVE

A few miles away, on the outskirts of Springwood, stood Westin Hills Psychiatric Hospital. Anyone taking the isolated road that led up to the gates of the asylum was met with a sign warning against trespassing. This just had to be somebody's idea of a joke, because Westin Hills was the last place on Earth anyone would want to break into—most people wanted to break out.

The institution was huge: a brick neo-Gothic mansion originally built in the 1890s as the private home of a local tycoon. When the original owners left town in the 1930s, they handed the building over to the state. The remote location and the impressive size of the place made it ideal for the incarceration of the criminally insane. The people of Springwood weren't too happy to have a mansion full of murderous lunatics opened on their doorstep—and no one wanted to work there save for a handful of medical staff, who had to rely on charity workers for general support and nursing. So folk weren't too upset when in 1946, the place was shut down.

There had been a scandal. One of the nurses, a nun, had somehow been captured and held prisoner by the inmates. They'd kept her hidden for days, during which time they'd raped her hundreds of times until she herself had become totally insane—and pregnant. The nun's religious name was Sister Mary Helena, but she had been born Amanda Krueger. And the room she'd been locked in was no better than a dungeon, with its rusted walkways, scalding pipes and heavy iron door.

Nine months after her terrible ordeal, Sister Mary Helena gave birth to a son. The delivery was agonizing—a breech birth—and when it was done, Amanda was taken back to her room and locked up. She was in no condition to raise the child, so it was taken from her and put up for adoption. It was the baby's cruel stepfather who named the Krueger kid "Freddy".

The whole horrifying story soon became common knowledge around town, and as Freddy grew up, he had to suffer constant abuse and taunting from all the other kids right through school. And when

he got home from school, his no-good stepfather would repeatedly beat him with a leather strap. In time, pain and fear became Freddy's only friends.

Krueger never once visited his mother. As far as he was concerned, she was to blame for everything that was wrong with his life. When he crushed small animals with his bare hands, it was Mommy's fault. When he slashed his own stomach with a straight razor, Mommy was to blame. When he stabbed his drunken stepfather in the eye, his Mommy made him do it—the fucking bitch!

When Krueger was arrested and killed in 1966, it was generally believed Amanda Krueger had hanged herself. There was even a headstone with Amanda's name on it in the town cemetery. But the grave was empty. It wasn't until many years later that Amanda's body was found walled-up in a room inside the high tower at Westin Hills, by which time, the hospital had long been in use again.

Developments in medical practice had led to Westin Hills being reopened in the late 1960s as a more enlightened center for the treatment of general psychiatric illness which it continued to be until the present day, save for a brief period in the 1980s when the place was closed down owing to yet another malpractice scandal...

Now, however, Westin Hills was very much a progressive institution. It prided itself on offering good proactive, up-to-the-minute health care that was perhaps at odds with the intimidating "haunted house" exterior of the building itself.

There was certainly no truth to the rumors that any of the patients currently being treated at Westin Hills were being held unnecessarily or in any way against their will.

***

Kinsey shone a pen-light into the eyes of the patient sitting in the wheelchair. The pupils completely failed to react.

Kinsey stood back.

Drool ran down from the patient's open mouth.

"Nobody home," declared the male nurse. "This guy's ready for 'D' Wing."

He motioned for an orderly to wheel the patient away.

Mark and Will watched the scene from their seats in the hospital common room. Both guys were pretty young, about the same age as Lori, and neither of them looked like they really belonged here. Granted, Mark looked pretty intense, and one of his eyes had a slight tic, but you could find people in much worse condition any night, in any downtown of America.

Mark's eye twitched again as he watched the orderly roll the vegetable out of the large open room.

"If I turn out like that," he said to his friend, "put a pillow over my face, will you?"

Will made no attempt to reply. He got the message. And he agreed one hundred per cent.

What they'd just witnessed was pretty normal for this place. The guy in the wheelchair was only the latest in a long line of psychiatric patients who'd simply given up on life. Will had seen them slip away. One day, they're fine—talking, laughing, reasonably normal—then slowly they turn into zombies, their personalities fading day-by-day into nothing. But it only happened to inmates who'd been here the longest. So maybe that was the answer; get fixed and get out before the Westin Rot set in.

Though Will looked more calm and more relaxed than his blond-haired friend, his stare had a distinctly damaged quality. Will had been through some pretty bad experiences over the last few years—they both had—but while their time at Westin had made Mark more erratic, it had made Will more determined.

Will was a boy in need of a purpose, some direction; something he was never going to find at Westin Hills.

God, how much longer were they going to have to stay here?

A blue light came on, over on the far wall. Beneath the light was a reinforced glass window to the hospital dispensary, a small office where the nightshift nurse could while away the hours in front of a portable TV. The dispensary was also where all the patients had to queue up for their nightly dose of happy pills. Tonight, it was Kinsey's privilege to dole out the brain candy.

Will and Mark joined the line that formed in front of the window.

Great. Medication.

They got the same thing night after night.

Kinsey pushed Mark's pill through a gap in the protected glass. Mark looked at the tablet. It had a tiny name printed on its glossy sugar coat.

"Hypnocil," he scowled, not for the first time. "What's this shit do, anyway? How come we all have to take it?"

Kinsey scowled back. "So you'll be good and docile when I kick your ass."

Mark shrugged and swallowed the pill. But he'd asked a good question. Why were all the patients on the same drug? They couldn't all be ill with the same malady, could they?

When Will got to the window, he couldn't help but wonder the same thing. It was supposed to be a general dispensary but nearly every bottle on every shelf contained the same damned drug: *Hypnocil.*

Kinsey pushed Will's medication through the hole in the glass.

Will ignored it.

His attention had been seized by a news report playing on the portable TV over Kinsey's shoulder.

"...tonight's murder in this quiet suburban neighborhood of Springwood. Details on this tragedy remain unavailable..."

A reporter was standing in front of a place Will recognized. It was 1428 Elm Street. If only this damned glass wasn't muting the sound.

Will ignored the pill and pointed at the TV: "Hey, turn that up!"

Kinsey turned the TV *off*

"Sorry, Will. You know the rules."

Will became frantic, scrabbling at the glass.

The other patients became increasingly upset as the dark-haired boy started to pound on the glass window, growing more angry with each blow.

"Turn that back on, man! I know somebody that lives in that house! C'mon—turn it on!"

Kinsey sighed.

Here we go again...

He tilted his head down and gave Will a cold, piercing stare. Then slowly, deliberately, Kinsey opened a black case lying on the desk of the dispensary. Inside the case was a syringe.

Mark quickly pulled Will away from the glass. "What are you doing? You want 10ccs of that pink tranquilizer in your ass?"

"That was Lori's house!" Will was still hyper. "They said something about a murder. I gotta go there, Mark. I gotta go see if she's okay."

"Back to Springwood?" asked Mark sounding frightened. "You want me to start having nightmares again?"

Will didn't want to hear this. "Don't start with the Dream Demon shit! You know that's all just in your head."

"Yeah? And who are you? The poster boy for sanity? You're the one that told the cops Lori's Dad killed his wife—"

That's true. He had.

Will had told the cops that he had seen Dr Campbell murder his wife. He had seen Lori's Dad kill Lori's Mom. And for that, they'd locked him away. For being the only witness to a brutal slaying, Will had been confined in Westin Hills and shot full of Hypnocil.

Mark led his friend over to the corner of the common room, where patients could play games. On one of the tables was a chess set, on another was a backgammon board. A Monopoly game was scattered across the floor nearby, as if someone had swept the whole board into the air in the middle of a game.

Another patient, a mute guy, held a checkers board in his hand. He bumped it into Mark's arm. Repeatedly.

But Mark was too caught up in his fight with Will to notice.

"Right," said Will. "And now it looks like someone else got killed there. You think that's a coincidence? Two murders in the same house?"

Mark had had enough.

He turned on the patient with the checkers board and shouted, "Kurt, how many times do I have to tell you? I don't do checkers. I'm an Uno guy. Go find the damn Uno deck and we'll play. Okay? Now go!"

Mark seemed to deflate in his chair, his anger with Will spent on poor Kurt.

"Look at us, Will. Look around you. We're *institutionalized*. We're not going anywhere."

And at this precise point in time, it looked as if Will had no choice but to agree.

***

The rest of the night was an endless expanse of nothing, as far as Will was concerned. He couldn't get his mind off Lori, and off that TV report of a murder on Elm Street. And what about the other things Mark had said. Would they ever get out of Westin Hills?

Will lay awake on his bed. Lori was in danger. It was her father. It had to be. He was going on a rampage, like that night four years ago, when Will had seen him the knife.

Shit.

The lights were low. Will shared a ward with Mark and a number of other patients, but for all the total lack of decoration in the place, the room could just as well have been a prison cell.

***

Mark lay in the adjacent bed. He was also thinking about the future—and the past.

He had met Will here, at the hospital. They hadn't known each other before then. Will had told him some paranoid story about being locked up under some kind of conspiracy. From the day they'd met, Will had insisted he'd been sent to Westin Hills to keep him quiet. He said that only he knew what had happened at 1428 Elm Street, that night four years ago. No wonder he'd totally bugged out when he'd seen tonight's news.

But Mark wasn't sure if he even believed the guy.

Maybe the whole Dr Campbell thing was all part of Will's delusions. Maybe Will had had some kind of breakdown brought on by Campbell standing between him and Lori.

Whatever the answer, Will was Mark's best friend and Mark truly wanted to believe him.

Mark sighed and turned over on his bed. He looked up at a photo of his family taped to the wall, dark in the dim light. There were no question marks over why he himself was a patient at Westin. Around the same time Will was going through his problems, Mark's brother, Bobby, committed suicide. And soon after Bobby's death Mark had started having nightmares—violent nightmares. His parents had panicked. They were worried that Mark too might hurt himself, so they sent him here.

Turned out that other kids had been killing themselves and having bad dreams as well. Many of them had been brought to Westin. Mark had overheard one of the doctors refer to the teenagers as suffering from Adolescent Hysteria Syndrome.

So that's what Mark had: AHS.

And it sounded like what Will had as well, only Will wouldn't accept it. So they never talked about it. Until now.

Quietly, so as not to disturb the other patients in the ward, Mark said, "My parents are a little whacked. I mean, they love me and everything... but one son in the loony bin, the other committed suicide..."

He paused, but Will said nothing.

"You listening to me?" asked Mark. He knew Will was awake, but still no answer.

He knew why.

Lori.

Lori had been Will's girl.

"You really care about her, don't you? All these years and you're still convinced you saw her father do that—"

Will cut in angrily, "I know what I saw, Mark. Fuck what the doctors tried to get me to believe. I gotta know if she's okay."

Mark sat up and looked over at Will. He didn't like to see his pal like this. He didn't like the fact that there was nothing they could do about it—no one they could talk to—no one they could call. And Mark didn't like the fact that the two of them were going nowhere, except maybe on a four-wheel ride to "D" Wing.

"Alright," Mark nodded. He'd reached a decision.

***

It was quiet in the common room now. The fruitcakes had taken their Hypnocil like good dogs and had gone to bed, leaving Kinsey alone in his cramped office to watch some TV.

Someone stepped up to the dispensary window.

Holy…

Kinsey relaxed. It was just one of the kids: Mark.

Except that the next thing the male nurse knew, Mark was throwing his night clothes off, and shouting and banging his fists on the reinforced dispensary window. The idiot clambered on one of the tables, hooting and capering like a demented monkey. He turned and waved his bare butt at Kinsey through the window.

Enough was enough!

"Oh, you wanna play?"

Kinsey switched off the TV, reached for the black case containing the syringe full of tranquilizer and picked up a nightstick.

As soon as Mark saw Kinsey reach for the baton, he ran off down one of the long hospital corridors. There was no way he was gonna let that moron beat on him. Well, not until Mark had achieved what he had set out to do.

Moments later, the hospital hallways were alive with the sounds of chase—Mark shouting and slamming doors and Kinsey and two orderlies running after him, calling out every threat imaginable.

For Mark the whole escapade was scary but great fun, even though he knew it would end only one way…

Eventually, drugged and drowsy, and sporting a few new cuts and bruises, Mark was strapped down tightly onto his bed by the orderlies.

Kinsey opened up his little black case, and gave Mark his second dose of sleep-juice. "Sweet dreams monkey-boy!"

Then the nurse and the orderlies were gone.

As soon as they were out the door, Will got up and crept over to his friend. The restraints on Mark were really tight.

"What the hell was that for?" Will asked.

Mark smiled and flicked his eyes down toward his left hand. Will looked and saw that his friend was clutching Kinsey's keys, his swipe card and his ID badge.

***

Mark had been beaten, he had been drugged. He was drowsy and exhausted—which is why Will had to half-carry Mark as they crept along the quiet road that would lead them away from Westin Hills Psychiatric Hospital. But the slow speed didn't matter. It would be hours before anyone would even know they were gone.

Will was ecstatic.

"Mark, you're a fucking lunatic. You know that?"

"I know you are," slurred Mark, "but what am I?"

Somehow, the two of them had beaten the odds.

They had escaped from that rat-bastard place and were on their way to Elm Street.

SIX

It was dawn before Dr Campbell arrived at the police station. He was shocked at just how bad his daughter looked. Judging by the state of her eyes, Lori hadn't slept a wink all night.

When he got there the two of them just hugged, the Sheriff standing by almost as if Lori was being released from custody into her father's care.

By the time they arrived back at home, they found the police still at work. There were a few cop cars outside the Campbell home—1428 Elm—and there were officers in almost every room of the house, searching, sifting, checking, looking for anything that would help identify Trey's killer.

Campbell offered to make breakfast, but Lori wasn't hungry. However, she did agree to a glass of orange juice. It would refresh her, help her stay awake.

The two of them were alone in the kitchen.

Lori could hear the cops milling about upstairs and in the adjacent living room. She felt awful, tired, numb. Dr Campbell finished pouring Lori's juice. He glanced back over his shoulder.

Good.

She wasn't paying any attention.

While Lori wasn't looking, Dr Campbell took out a small bottle of pills from inside his jacket. Then he opened the bottle and dropped one of the pills into the glass of orange juice.

Written in tiny letters on the pill was one word: *Hypnocil*.

***

"You sure you didn't see anyone?" Campbell sounded casual as he put the tumbler down in front of Lori.

"None of us did, Dad. I already went over this with the police."

"I just..." It was hard for him to find the right words. "I don't know what I'd do if I lost you. You're all I have left."

Lori looked at him warmly. Her father was a proud man, and he didn't have much of a sense of humor, but the death of his wife, Lori's Mom, had changed him so much. Lori knew how much he loved and needed her, yet since her Mom's death, her Dad had seemed distant, as if he always had something on his mind. But despite all his own troubles, Dr Campbell had been a great comfort when Will had run out on Lori like that.

"I'm not going anywhere," Lori reassured her father. "I promise."

Campbell smiled tearfully, then checked himself and stiffened. Suddenly he was the doctor again.

"Look at you," he said. "You're exhausted. We need to get you to bed."

Lori blanched.

What if that guy... that nightmare creature came to her again? "I don't want to sleep right now, Dad. I want to be with my friends." She stood up. She still hadn't taken a sip of her orange juice.

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to go to school today. You've just been through something very traumatic."

"Look, I can't stay in this house. I just need to get out, okay?" Lori saw a look of hurt cross her father's face. "Don't worry. I'm fine. Really."

She gave her best shot at a reassuring smile. It seemed. to work, and she turned to walk away.

Campbell quickly picked up the full glass. "Hey, drink your juice at least!"

But Lori wasn't interested.

She hurried out of the kitchen, leaving her father no choice but to pour the untouched juice down the drain.

***

Sheriff Williams had been in the living room while Lori walked through. She had glanced into his eyes before turning her face to the floor and pushing by him.

Williams watched her go, his face thoughtful, concerned, resolute. Lori didn't know the half of what had gone on last night. The

situation was getting worse. He looked grave when he joined Dr Campbell in the kitchen.

"Will Rollins and the Davis boy escaped from Westin Hills last night."

Campbell had to grab hold of a chair to steady himself.

Rollins.

The boy who'd accused him of murder.

"Jesus," he whispered. "It's all coming apart again."

Sheriff Williams laid a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry. We'll find them. Get this thing contained."

That's all they could do—police by containment. That's the way it always was with Elm Street.

These "bad spells" came along and the police closed them down. Sure, the police thought they'd got it licked—each and every damned time—but it just kept on coming back.

But not this time. This time, Sheriff Williams would fix the Elm Street problem for good.

***

Lori had changed her clothes and put on her backpack, ready for school. But her mind hadn't been on her preparations. All she could think of was that terrible nightmare: the child with the mutilated eyes, those kids with the nursery rhyme, and that creep, that ugly burned creature with the razor fingers.

He'd rushed at her, appearing for a moment then disappearing, then suddenly reappearing again, jerking closer and closer until bursting to sick life right in front of her face. And there was something else...

She had seen something else in her dream...

Her house!

Lori picked up her things and ran down the stairs. Her Dad was with that creepy Sheriff, so she didn't bother to say goodbye before heading out the front door.

The door...

Making sure none of the cops out front were watching her, Lori closed the front door then carefully used her house key to scratch at the yellow paint.

Bit by bit she scraped at the paint, but it remained defiantly yellow.

"It was just a dream," she sighed, relieved—just at the moment her key scraped through to the red paint underneath, the same red she had seen in her dreams where the house had been derelict and the door had run crimson with blood.

No…

Lori reeled at the implication of her discovery. The door used to be red! In her dreams, she had seen how the house used to be. But how could she?

She had to see her friends.

Stat!

***

Springwood High School would have looked familiar to anyone who had ever seen any of the countless TV shows set in high school. The gates, the yard, the corridors, the main hallway—the school was alive with kids, teenagers and young adults carrying bags, clutching books and folders, and generally looking happening and connected. But Springwood High was consistently below national averages for academic performance. And when the school did make the news, it was for all the wrong reasons. Just like today.

All the kids had heard about the murders last night. Everywhere Gibb and Kia turned, people were talking about them, whispering, shooting cautious glances.

Kia could handle all this—she didn't care what the other kids thought, she was more concerned with what had actually happened over at Lori's place—but Gibb…

Gibb was losing it.

Her boyfriend had been killed. She had fled the house with Trey's blood on her hands, and now she was here on a bright sunny morning, constantly on the brink of tears.

Lori ran up the stairs to meet them and they went into a group hug. They needed this.

"I wasn't sure you were gonna come, Gibb," said Lori, who was totally aced by Gibb's reply.

"Blake's dead too."

"What?" Lori's mind reeled.

"Late last night," continued Gibb. "Stabbed to death. Same with his Dad."

"It's bullshit!" Kia snapped. "The police are blaming everything on Blake. Like it's some kind of Columbine thing or something. They're saying he went crazy... killed Trey, killed his Dad, then took his own life."

Again, Kia noticed all the other students watching them.

"I guess everyone saw it on the news," she said. "They all know. This is so messed up."

Gibb wasn't so tough. Sick and tired of being stared at, at being talked about, at being treated like a freak, Gibb broke away from her friends and shouted out for the benefit of all the kids slowly filing into class, each and every one giving her a pitying look.

"Stop staring at me!"

For a moment there was total silence.

And then the school bell rang.

***

Despite Sheriff Williams's concern over the Westin Hills escape, nearly all his resources had been swallowed up by the triple homicide. He had only one officer to spare on Will and Mark. The obvious thing to do was to watch their homes—where their parents lived—so he assigned the officer to watch over the Rollins place. The Sheriff was more eager to lay his hands on Will Rollins; Mark Davis could wait a while.

So it was by total good fortune that the two fugitives had gone to Mark's place. They'd waited until Mark's parents had left for work, then went inside and grabbed a change of clothing. By the time they'd finished, they looked just like any other Springwood teenager.

Which was a good thing, as they were now making their way on foot, by the back streets, to Springwood High.

"Hey," said Mark suddenly as they jogged along. "What if Lori's not here? What if she was the one that died?"

Will stopped and grabbed Mark by the arm. "Don't say that, man. Don't fucking say that!"

"Alright, alright... just calm down. We'll find her."

***

That first morning back at school had been rough. One way or another, everyone had wanted a piece of the three of them. Either people expressed their condolences, or they asked intrusive questions—some of the other students even made jokes of it all.

When class finished, Lori hurried out into the hall before anyone else could bother her. Kia tried to keep up, but Linderman got in the way. Linderman didn't even notice Kia. He was too busy trying to catch Lori.

"Um, Lori?"

Lori stopped and turned. "What is it, Linderman?"

Linderman was the class nerd. There was nothing particularly offensive about him, he wasn't a Grade "A" fool or anything. He just happened to have a bit of a baby's face, and sometimes a total inability to say the right thing. At times his lack of emotional maturity was just too much to handle.

"Well," ventured the boy, "I heard what happened, and I just wanted to... you know, express how... how... to let you know how sorry I was."

Kia came in at the end of this demonstration of embarrassed stuttering and just rolled her eyes.

Lori tried to be polite, but it still felt awkward. "That's sweet of you, thanks."

"Right, okay, but um, if you need someone to talk to... you know, to maybe grieve with, I could—"

Kia had heard enough. "Let me give you a tip, Linderman. Put your hormones back in the box and quit while you're ahead, okay? We

don't have time for Date-a-Dork right now."

That was Linderman's problem. He meant well, but suddenly realized that he had been cracking on to Lori in a really dumb way. He didn't know how it happened. He'd wanted to tell her how sorry he was about the murder and everything.

"Right," he said, nodding with intense agreement. "Sorry... sorry."

His eyes flickered longingly towards Lori as he forced himself to basically get the hell out of her face.

Kia was not impressed by his performance. She watched him slink away into the crowd.

"Every day it's the same thing," she said in Lori's ear. "He's like one of those fucking froo-froo dogs that keeps humping your leg."

Lori was looking over the way, at Gibb.

Heck no.

What was she doing with that stoner, Freeburg? And Shack, the guy who put the "moron" in "jock".

Freeburg was handing out bright yellow cards to any student who walked by, but Gibb was clearly the focus of his attention. Hey, she was almost a celebrity right now.

"That's why you should go, Gibb," he said. "Be among friends, where it's safe. There's gonna be a lotta love there, for you and Trey."

Lori saw someone take one of Freeburg's flyers. He was promoting yet another of his infamous raves.

"Fuck it. You're right," said Gibb. "I could use a few dozen drinks."

"Attagirl!" bellowed Shack. "Let your freak flag fly."

Gibb saw Lori and Kia.

"You guys coming?" she asked, walking over.

What was it with Gibb? First Trey and Blake, now Freeburg and Shack. Was she some kind of asshole-magnet or something?

"I don't know if I'm up for it," said Lori. "I barely slept last night... and when I did sleep, I had the *worst* nightmare."

"I can't believe you had to sleep in the police station," said Kia indignant. "I'd have nightmares too."

"This was different. There was a man... more like a monster, really. They called him Freddy. He was so real."

"So what'd he look like?" asked Gibb, not really caring. Why was Lori telling her, of all people, about her stupid nightmares? What Gibb had seen was real. Trey, Blake and Blake's Dad had been killed, the murderer hadn't been caught and was still loose on the streets of Springwood, and here's Lori talking about her fucking dreams!

"He wore this dark brown hat... And his skin... was horribly burned. And on his right hand, he had these long razors... fingers."

Lori was so lost in trying to recall what the nightmare guy looked like, that she didn't notice a number of passing students had stopped to listen.

"Then there were these little girls singing this strange song... like a jump-rope rhyme."

"*One, two, Freddy's coming for you...*"

Who was that?

Lori turned, her eyes wide open in surprise... and saw Mark jogging across towards them all.

Will and Mark were just across the street from the school when they first saw Lori and her friends. They'd tried to cross the road at the same time, but Will nearly ran into a passing car, so had to hold back while his friend went on ahead.

Now all the students simply looked at Mark as he told Lori what he knew.

"You know why they sing that?" he said. "Because that's when Freddy comes for you. While you sleep! You're lucky to be alive."

Everything about Shack's broad-shouldered body language said he thought the little blond guy was a jerk, but Lori knew different. This intense looking kid with the tic somehow knew the words she'd heard in her dream.

"Who is he?" she asked Mark. "Please... tell me."

There was a lot of bitterness in Mark's voice when he replied. He'd had too much history with this whole nightmare thing. He'd come here as a favor to Will, but when he heard Lori talk about that guy in that nightmare, the whole world had turned three sixty for him. Suddenly this was as much Mark's fight as it was Will's.

Mark spat the words out: "A child murderer that some parents from around here burned alive. But then... he came back. Back for

revenge in our nightmares. Funny no one ever told us about him, huh?"

Lori's head started to spin, and she swayed a little as if she was going to faint. She looked terrified, and her fear was spreading through the rest of the kids.

"He's real?" she cried. "But what... how do you..."

Mark motioned for her to be quiet.

"You want some free advice?" he said almost cruelly. "Coffee—make friends with it."

Suddenly a hand grabbed Mark from behind, and pulled him away. Another guy, his friend, who seemed more than familiar.

"That's enough, Mark! Can't you see you're scaring her?"

That face...

That voice...

Out of nowhere after all this time.

Could it be...

"Will?"

He stepped forward, a look of grave concern on his face. "I thought you might be in trouble, so we..."

But Lori wasn't listening.

Seeing Will's face right now, after everything that had happened, after her nightmare, after Mark's crazy story seeing Will again like this, was just one final shock too far. Lori's body went limp and she dropped to the ground.

SEVEN

Lori's mind was in turmoil. As she lay there on the floor of the school hallway, she could hear everyone whispering, talking about her. The other students had seen her faint, and had crowded around her.

"She passed out... they know who killed Trey... name is Freddy Krueger... child murderer... said he comes in our nightmares... Blake's dead... drink your juice... Will..."

The voices all blended into one another until coming to a sudden stop with one single word said in that one single voice... "*Boo*."

***

Her friends had carried Lori to the school infirmary examining room, where she lay in bed, tossing and turning in her sleep.

There was a frosted glass window in the wall over Lori's bed. Something rose... stood up... on the other side of the glass.

The frosting made it hard to see anything about the person in detail, but you could see the colors just fine. Whoever it was that was on the other side of the rippled glass, he or she was wearing something in red and green.

***

There was a red and green sign pinned to the wall above Kia's head as she sat out in the waiting room. The sign read: "HOW ARE YOU DOING?"

There was another sign on the wall next to Gibb, who was sitting beside Kia on the row of brown leather seats. The sign over Gibb said, "GIVE BLOOD—SAVE LIVES."

Both girls had been working their way through some fashion magazines that were piled up on the waiting room table. They'd been here for some time now, hoping to get some news on their friend. Gibb seemed to be nodding off, though it was hard to tell under her ever-present baseball cap.

Kia flicked through the glossy photo pages. She was pretty much on top of the fashion thing right now, in her knee-high boots, floral skirt and intricately designed ethnic top. Whereas Gibb's hands had probably seen only soap and water that morning, Kia's fingers were immaculately manicured, and she wore a sprinkling of rings, a snappy wristband and a silver watch to die for.

Kia looked at her watch now. She called up to the nurse working quietly at her desk.

"How much longer?" she asked. "Is Lori okay or what?"

With an annoyed look on her face, the nurse stared at Kia, slowly raised a finger to her lips and went, "Shhhhh."

All the crap Kia had been through over these last two days, and all she got was this bullshit? Kia shook her head and went back to her magazine—where she saw page after page of perfect looking models. Which was not what she needed.

She looked up at the nurse again.

"For a nose-job, what kind of anesthesia do doctors use? They put you all the way under, right?"

Again, the nurse said nothing. She just pointed to a sign on the wall behind her desk.

Kia read it: "THE NURSE CAN'T HELP YOU."

What kind of hospital is this?

Whatever.

Kia returned to the magazine a further time and... whoa...

When she turned the page she saw there was a section on cosmetic surgery. The models—all women were—semi-naked, but they had marker lines on their faces and bodies, showing where surgical incisions were going to be made. It was horrible. Okay, it was only a marker pen or something, but it made them look like human jigsaws.

Kia turned the page.

Oh, like, gross!

The magazine showed totally real before—and—after photos of people who'd had plastic surgery done on their faces, only the "after" shots had been taken immediately after the operations.

The faces looked bruised, scarred, cut, blooded, scabbed-over.

Kia turned the page... and another... and another... and another... but the pictures just got worse. She couldn't believe that anyone would want to print this kind of stuff, it was horrible.

When Kia got to the photographs depicting a veritable arsenal of bizarre and terrifying surgical instruments, she nearly hurled. And...

No way.

No.

Way.

She was looking at pieces of bone—chipped and hacked away.

And mounds of flesh and fat, all red and glistening in shining metal receptacles...

And people with scars...

Injuries...

Amputees...

She turned the pages. Faster, faster.

A body wired up to metal hooks and electro-clamps...

Faster.

A hellish collage of vivisected women...

Faster.

More flesh...

Faster.

More horror...

Faster.

A glove with long rusty blades fixed to the fingers, forming a death claw...

CH-AIIICCCKKKTTT!!!

The glove shot forward out of the photograph, reaching out through the flat pages of the magazine to tear like a frenetic slicing machine into Kia's nose and face. She flung herself back, the great gaping hole in the middle of her face spraying hot, crimson blood across the fashion magazine.

"Got your nose!" laughed Freddy.

***

Kia howled and woke up.

The magazine lay open on her lap at an article entitled "Is Red & Green The New Black?" She tossed the journal to the floor as if it were a venomous snake.

Beside her, Gibb recoiled in shock. Then she just stared at Kia, afraid.

No big.

Kia had just been daydreaming. But the memory of the daydream was still fresh in Kia's mind. Without thinking, she touched her nose, to see if...

Kia shuddered. She was having a nosebleed.

***

"Strong work," complained Will. "I came to make sure she's okay, and you put her in the infirmary. What were you thinking, telling her all that stuff, man? We're not in Group!"

Will and Mark were waiting in the school hallway outside of the infirmary. To say that Will had not been impressed by Mark's callous behavior would be an understatement. But Mark was taking nothing back. Something was starting to add up here.

Mark shot straight back at Will: "I'm thinking for the first time in my life that maybe I'm not crazy. She had the same dream. My brother was right."

Before Bobby had killed himself, he'd told Mark everything. In fact, he'd told everyone he could about his nightmares—about the children and the rhyme, about Freddy Krueger. He'd said Krueger was coming for him. Bobby had said that Krueger was going to kill him. But no one believed him. So Bobby had died.

How could Lori have dreamt the same thing as his brother? Unless...

Suddenly a voice called down the corridor: "Will? Mark? I need to talk to you."

It was Principal Shaye... with a couple of police officers.

"Shit," said Will under breath.

The School Principal was dressed in smart casual clothing, and he had that lived-in look typical among Sixties flower children who'd

found themselves on a regular salary and voting Republican thirty or forty years down the road. However, unlike many of his peers, Shaye took a progressive approach to education. Indeed, when he first came to Springwood High, he'd soon learned that a formal or heavy-handed method only made things worse.

But there were times when you had to draw the line.

The cops fanned out either side of Shaye, as he tried to defuse any potential situation here.

"Take it easy, boys," the Principal continued. "Nobody wants any trouble. The important thing is that you're safe. Now if you'd let these officers take you back to the hospital..."

Which was all Will and Mark needed to hear.

They ran like crazy, catching the cops off balance, and forcing their way through a nearby emergency exit, triggering the alarm.

It didn't take long for the police officers to gather their wits, but by the time they reached the street by the side of the school the two boys were plain out of sight. One of the officers reached for his radio. Those lunatics wouldn't get far. There were only so many places they could go.

***

But Will and Mark didn't go to their homes. Nor did they go back to Springwood High. Instead, taking care to dodge every cop and patrol car they came across, the two of them made their way to Springwood Town Library.

Will didn't see any sense in this; it had been Mark's idea. He had got to thinking about the past, he said, about what his brother had said all those years ago, and about Lori's dream. How could Lori have had the same nightmare as his brother? Why did they both dream about the same maniac killer?

"This doesn't make any sense," said Mark.

The two of them were huddled round a Stone Age microfiche viewer.

"There's nothing on Krueger. Not his arrest, death... not even a birth certificate."

"Maybe he never even existed," suggested Will. "You ever think of that?"

"Maybe they just didn't put the stuff on film or computer yet... Wait a second! Look at this."

Will moved over and looked at the copy of the newspaper front page Mark had found. It was the local Springwood daily from some years back. Large sections of the page had been blacked out, leaving only partial headlines and the occasional picture.

Mark scrolled forward.

"Check it out, man. Whole sections of the records are gone. Look at all these blacked out obituaries."

Mark was onto something.

Quickly he pulled out another microfiche roll, and put it under the viewer. He was looking for a specific date.

Again, more missing sections, more blacked out paragraphs. This was scary shit.

"January 18," he said at last. "The day my brother committed suicide. Why isn't that in here?"

This was getting too much for Will. It was beginning to sound crazy even for two escaped inmates from Westin Hills. All these years he'd had trouble convincing Mark that he'd seen Lori's father commit murder, but now Mark had turned the tables. It was Will who was having trouble believing.

"I don't know," he said. "But I'm sure there's a good reason. Remember in Group how they told us not to jump to conclusions before—"

Mark grabbed Will by the shirt.

"Jesus, listen to yourself! You hold onto that psycho babble like a security blanket! Let it go, man!"

He himself let Will go, as if to illustrate.

"They covered him up, Will. They never told us about Freddy, because that's how they decided to beat him. They went after him like he was a fucking *disease*. Locked up the kids who'd made contact with him so they wouldn't infect the others."

"That's crazy."

"Is it? How come we were never allowed to call any of our friends? How come none of our friends ever called us? We were in fucking quarantine, man. That's what Westin was for. The really crazy thing is that it worked."

"Until now?" Will asked, shaking his head in disbelief.

Mark took no pleasure in nodding the affirmative. It was just beginning to fully sink in that some bastard could have murdered his brother after all. And all this time, their parents, their friends—everyone—had thought it was suicide.

The kids diagnosed with AHS?

They were all Freddy's children.

***

Later that night, Kia, Gibb and Lori were heading out of town in Kia's metallic red, open-top Jeep.

The rest of the day had passed in a blur.

Lori had checked out fine. The school doctor said she'd just needed some sleep, that's all, and Kia's nosebleed too was just a normal reaction to all the stress she'd been through. All the same, they'd left school early and made the decision to go to Freeburg's rave.

They needed to bounce back. They couldn't just hide in a box and wait for the next bad thing to happen.

And what if the police were right? What if it had been Blake? The guy had been pretty drunk all night at Lori's house.

Dr Campbell certainly was in total agreement with Sheriff Williams on this issue. But he'd still been acting a little strange before Lori's friends came to pick her up.

By now a strange unreality had descended on the three of them. There they were, in the eye of a hurricane of homicide, and they were going out to party. Almost as if they were desperate for their lives to get back to normal.

Lori had one of Freeburg's yellow cards in her hands. She sat in the passenger seat, giving Kia road directions.

Gibb rode shotgun. Lori was concerned for her. Since the death of Trey, Gibb had looked as if she'd lost it, but now... she was somehow

overcompensating. She wanted to party like she'd never partied before, as if she was in denial or something.

Lori turned round to look back at her. "You sure you're up for this, Gibb?"

"You kidding?" Gibb swigged on her beer. "I've never been more up for something. All I want to do tonight is forget."

***

Mark waited for the patrol car to slowly roll on by, then hurried up the driveway of his home—where he used to live before he became a permanent guest of Westin Hills.

The house appeared empty and no one was around, but it wasn't the house that Mark Davis was interested right now. Keeping low, he led his friend along to the car-port where some kind of large vehicle was hidden beneath a heavy gray tarpaulin.

Will was still trying to catch up with Mark's thinking.

"Even if all you're saying is true, then why didn't Freddy kill Lori?"

"Maybe he's not strong enough yet," Mark answered. "My brother... my brother said it's our fear that gives him his power."

"Well you sure as hell spread enough fear today at school."

This hit Mark. It hit him bad.

"Holy shit, you're right! They wanted to forget Freddy so they wouldn't fear him. What if I screwed up the town's plan?" He started to panic. "Oh God! This fucker's gonna spread like the plague. Kids are gonna start falling asleep and... and it's gonna be a bloodbath! Let's leave, man. Right now."

Will shook his head. "I can't... not after today. I need to tell Lori where I've been all these years, make sure she's okay."

"She worth dying for? 'Cause if you fall asleep, man, you ain't waking up."

"If that's the case, how come you're not dead? Or any of the freaks at Westin? When's the last time you even *had* a nightmare?"

Mark was going out of his mind with fear, but this question stopped him in his tracks.

"I don't know," he frowned. "I can't remember my dreams anymore."

Will grabbed his friend's shoulder and smiled.

"Look," he said warmly, "just give me one night, okay? Let me find Lori and then we're out of here."

Mark considered for a moment, his eye twitching, then nodded.

"Alright, but if your ass isn't back here by dawn, I'm gone. We clear on that?"

Will was definitely clear on that.

Mark asked him to help with the tarpaulin. Taking a quick look around to check no one was watching them, the two guys lifted the heavy covering aside to reveal one motherfucker of a van.

"Now be careful," warned Mark. "This baby was my brother's pride and joy."

Which Will found hard to believe. Not so much because of the van itself, which was a pretty powerful beast, but because of the bespoke airbrushed artwork on the side; a painting of a huge-breasted, armored warrior babe taking an axe to a giant serpent. Fantasy art at its most lame.

"So lemme guess," smirked Will. "The serpent is a huge dick and she's trying to tame it?"

Mark was almost embarrassed. "Bobby had his issues, alright?"

But at the moment, all Will felt was gratitude. Mark had got him out of Westin Hills, and he was now doing Will a major league favor by lending Will his brother's automotive nirvana. And Mark was fighting his fear—fear that by talking to Lori, he might have just unleashed Freddy Krueger on the children of Springwood.

Will got into the van, checked the fuel gauge. Then he smiled at Mark and pulled slowly out of the driveway.

Mark watched the taillights of the van disappear round the corner of the street.

For God's sake, Will. Be careful.

EIGHT

Kia turned the Jeep down a long dark road. They were out in the country.

To the right, a dense cornfield stretched as far as they could see. Lori was almost mesmerized by the repetition of the cornstalks as they flickered past in the headlights. Finally, she looked across to Kia.

"Why are they having it out here in the middle of nowhere?" she asked.

Kia turned to Lori as if she was being a dumb-ass. "Uh...

that's the point, Lori. So the cops won't bust it up."

Then Kia turned her attention... *there was someone standing in the middle of the road.*

"Oh shit!"

He was tall, massive—and was that some kind of white mask on his face?

Kia yanked the wheel, barely missing the suicidal idiot.

"Christ, Kia!" shouted Gibb from the back, "I'm the one that's fucked up. What the fuck are you doing?"

"There was someone in the road!" Kia protested, but the other two girls hadn't seen anyone.

***

Another mile down the highway, they came across a scarecrow—like that's all they needed—but the sinister effigy was actually a sign, showing where corn had been cut away to form a lane that went deep into the cornfield.

Kia hung a right at the scarecrow and soon they were passing through the dark sea of cornstalks, with only the beam of their headlamps to light the way. As they drove further and further into the field, they could hear something over the sound of the engine. Something loud... repetitive... insistent...

Cool.

They could hear the energizing pounding of some block-rocking beats.

Seconds later, the Jeep rolled to a halt in a clearing that was being used as a makeshift car park.

Despite herself, Lori could feel her spirits lifting.

She could hear the beats, feel the bass, and there were cars, trucks, pickups and people—lots of people of all ages and backgrounds united in their one goal to have some kick-ass fun.

Wasting no time, the three of them got out of the vehicle and followed a trail of people through a narrow path between the dense cornstalks. Suddenly the path opened upon a wide circular clearing where everything was totally happening.

Welcome to the rave!

***

There were a hundred or so kids throwing shapes in front of the DJ, moving to the pumping bass in a great heaving mass of delirious abandon. Copper tiki torches mounted on cane poles shone round the perimeter of the dance space. Strobes scattered the night, perfectly complementing the heavy, swirling music. There were stacked kegs of beer. They had a small generator out here, flashing lights, some serious megawatts, and everyone was having the greatest time. Surely here they could lose themselves amidst the music, the lights and the pure energy of the dancing crowds.

Some of the party people had parked their cars round the edge of the clearing, and had left their headlights on, pointed in towards the dance reaction. And the kids hurling themselves around in abandoned bliss to the music looked pretty damn awesome. Even to Kia's jaded and cynical eyes, usually on the alert for the merest hint of a fashion crime, the swathe of huge, baggy combat pants, ruffled jackets and hair extensions sported by boys and girls alike were hip and happening. Hell, even the chemical-liquid glowsticks they waved had recently been taste-rehabilitated and were now just about cool again.

Gibb reached out and grabbed a cup of beer from a guy's hand as he bounded past, the most enormous, blessed-out grin on his face.

He didn't care. It was party time, people, lighten up! And she *was* kinda cute, even in those tomboy threads.

"Feeling better, Gibb?" asked Lori.

"Yeah. I'm officially in re-tox."

Then she was gone, vanishing in the pulsing body wave, arms already above her head, leaving Lori and Kia behind.

Beyond the clearing, Lori could see a massive grain silo.

Kia could see it too—the tall, round-topped cylinder. Oh God, it was making her feel horny. She needed therapy.

***

At the foot of the silo lay an old, rusted cornpicker, surrounded by weeds. The rave seemed almost quiet from out here, and the tall grain store was only faintly illuminated by the party lights in the near distance.

A hand reached out and grabbed one of the long, sharp cutting rods of the picker. It was Jason Voorhees.

He broke the rod free, then strode off through the corn in the direction of the rave.

The girls he had seen at the house were here.

They had escaped him.

Then they had nearly hit him back there on the road.

They had to die.

***

Frisell took a break from his thrashing. He was dripping with sweat, and he now had only one thing on his mind. He'd had the beer. He'd taken the beats. Now it was time to get nasty.

"Hey honeydew," he called, half out of his dancing skull, "you down for a light show?"

He waved his glowstick in Kia's face. Bad move.

"You down for some pepper spray?" she snapped back. Which did the job. Frisell went back to his trippy contortions, and Kia and Lori

got lost in the crowd.

***

Over at the entrance to the rave, a small red scooter spluttered noisily to a halt. Its rider looked like a mailman or something—his helmet was way too big. It was Linderman.

"Hey, Linderman!"

Oh no. He'd only just got here and now he'd been eyeballed by Shack and his Neanderthal football buddies. Linderman tried to make a break for it, but he was surrounded by a circle of inebriated muscle.

"C'mere buddy!" bellowed Shack. "We got something for you."

"Actually, Shack, I was headed over to..."

The next thing Linderman knew, his helmet was yanked off and a colossal tube of beer was forced through his lips. He tried to break free, but this only resulted in the whole damned thing spilling all over his face. This was the most hilarious thing the jock squad had seen all night. A nerd drowning in beer. Too much!

"Great..." said Linderman his thin suede-paneled jacket soaking with beer. "Thanks guys... really."

Shack and his buddies just laughed and left Linderman alone with his stink of booze. What a start to the evening.

In the center of the clearing, the dancing was hard and fast—the drum and bass music was mental. At the heart of the roiling bodies, amidst flickering the strobes, Linder man could see Gibb.

Wow. She's changed since this morning.

And she had. Gibb was trashed. She was dancing wildly, whipping her head around, spilling her beer. She was out of it at the speed of sound.

On the other side of the clearing, Freeburg was talking to some spaced-out weirdo, Rich, who was wearing a big dumb cloth hat and sucking on a pacifier.

"Freeburg!" called Rich. "Whassup! I've been looking for you, dog. I need the magic."

He sure as hell did if the redness of his eyes was anything to go by. But it was all magic to Freeburg's ears.

"Then come to the mountain, pilgrim," he proclaimed with Hollywood solemnity. "I can bestow what you seek..."

Then he seamlessly carried out a neat conjuring trick and pulled a small white Ecstasy tablet out of Rich-dude's ear.

Oh, these guys know how to have fun...

Linderman was not impressed.

Hey, there's Lori....

Alone!

Linderman hurried over to her, trying not to look too eager. He'd already screwed up once today, at school.

"Hey, Lori. Didn't think I'd see you here. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Smooth opening," said Kia stepping forward, handing a beer to Lori. "But we're taken care of."

Lori saw the state of Linderman's shirt and jacket.

"What happened to your clothes?" she asked, kindly.

"Oh this? Me and the lower primates were playing a drinking game. But it seems I was penalized for my ability to read above a fourth grade level."

"I just figured you for a straight-up bedwetter," dead panned Kia.

Just like she always did, she flamed him again. She was Lori's firewall against this no-timer.

But Linderman was pissed. First Shack and now this.

"You know, Kia? I used to think you hated me because you thought I wasn't good enough for Lori. But that's not it. You tear me down to make yourself feel better because you really hate yourself. Which is kind of pathetic, if you stop and think about it. Assuming, of course, you can think, with all that make-up and hair-dye weighing your head down."

Not exactly witty. Not exactly succinct. Nowhere near cutting. But it got the job done.

Linderman stalked off, leaving Kia speechless. Lori found herself smiling as she watched him go.

***

Screw dancing!

Gibb was out of beer. Sweaty and drunk, she stumbled over to the crowd by the beer kegs, and got in line. She couldn't help overhear what the guys in front of her were saying.

"The cops are saying Blake committed suicide. Grief over Trey," said one girl in silvery halter-top and cut-offs, dancing on the spot to a rhythm only she heard.

"That's b-bullshit," replied her friend. She swayed a little too much and over-compensated with a jerk, then reached out a hand uselessly to steady herself. Her pupils were so wide her eyes looked completely black. "I heard... this guy Krueger killed 'em both. I said his name to my parents, they almost shit themselves."

"And supposedly..." now it was Freeburg, Master of Ceremonies, talking twenty to the dozen, "... that Freddy freak used to live here." He shook his head. "Fucking gutted Trey like a goddamn turkey. Like, I heard there were these intestines and shit hanging out of him..."

Freeburg saw Gibb staring at him and any more words froze in his throat. He stood there, mouth open like a complete idiot.

Damn.

Gibb dropped her empty plastic cup and bolted off in the direction of the silo. Suddenly she needed some peace and quiet.

***

"Look who's here."

Lori followed Kia's pointing finger and saw... Will!

Finding Lori had been easy. Will had picked up one of Freeburg's cards back at the High School. And Will Rollins was a local boy. He knew his way around town. He wished Mark had come out with him, but understood his friend's reluctance. Besides which, Will was here

to heal some old wounds with Lori—and Mark didn't need to see that.

Kia had slipped away herself by the time Will stepped up.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey." Lori's flowing blonde hair looked great in the party lights and her face... God, he'd missed her.

"I heard you might be here," he said. "How are you feeling? You okay?"

Lori's reply was quiet, tender. "I'm fine. It was just... what happened the other night, then seeing you..."

"Yeah," Will shrugged, "I'm sorry about that. I used to spend hours thinking about what I'd say to you if I saw you again. Let's just say that wasn't how I rehearsed it."

***

God, her beautiful hair, her gorgeous green eyes, and that white bodice top... Linderman's heart was breaking as he looked over at Lori—talking to *Will*.

***

And Linderman's heart would break... into forty-two little fucking pieces if Jason had anything to do with it.

Voorhees watched Linderman from within the cover of the cornstalks.

He watched them all.

Teenagers. Drinking. Smoking. Taking drugs. Making out. Dancing. Singing. Having a good time.

Still holding onto the cutting rod of the cornpicker, Jason Voorhees stepped forward towards the light, his undead ribs vibrating with the bass of the jungle stack amplified mayhem.

***

Gibb swayed drunkenly beneath the shadow of the grain silo. The rave was still going on in the distance. They were all there. All her

friends. Having a good time.

Fucking A-1, like I give a shit…

In extreme contrast to the rain and thunder of last night it was dry and warm. There wasn't even a breeze to rustle the corn.

So what just made that sound… the sound of rustling in the corn?

Gibb turned and saw… *Trey!*

Trey, her boyfriend—her dead fucking boyfriend—walked slowly out of the cornstalks. His skin was deathly pale and his eyes were a sickly yellow color. He was dead. He had to be dead.

Oh no.

Trey opened his mouth to talk.

"Babe! I'm dead one day," he slurred, "and you're already out getting shitfaced. Same old Gibb."

"Trey! I can't believe it…"

Had there been a mistake down at the morgue?

How?

Who?

"C'mon," said Trey. "Let's go."

And he turned towards the red silo door—it was already part-way open.

Gibb couldn't move. She couldn't believe it. Trey was alive!

Trey's eyes narrowed. "Babe? Don't make me ask you twice, okay?"

Flashback.

Gibb could see him, standing on the staircase of 1428 Elm Street. He'd said that exact same thing to her just before going upstairs for his final rendezvous with sex and death.

And just like he did on Elm Street, Trey left without her. Only this time, he was hobbling.

He pushed the red door fully open, then limped into the darkness of the silo.

Gibb was confused—too drunk and too frightened to figure it out—but it was Trey! She could make sense of it all later. For now she… for now, she entered the silo behind him.

***

Steam blasted in her face.

Steam?

Gibb looked up.

Since when have there been pipes in a grain silo?

Water dripped down on the ground.

And why is it so hot in here?

Trey was walking ahead of her. He was still limping, only now he seemed more hunched. Gibb couldn't see him too clearly. There was a faint light coming from somewhere—an iron furnace—but Trey was mostly in shadow. And why did he keep touching his face and his chin?

"You're walking funny," called Gibb. "What's wrong?"

Trey turned sharply—savagely.

"The hell do you think's wrong? I had a fucking machete shoved up my ass."

His face was mangled. His neck was broken. That's why he kept holding his head—to stop it falling to the ground. Trey was balancing his fucking mangled head on his fucking broken neck!

Gibb screamed in abject terror. She turned to run back towards the silo door. But the silo door was gone.

"*Aha-hahahahahahahahaha!!!*

The deeply sinister laughter echoed all around her, causing her to cringe in fear.

***

Lori couldn't remember when she'd last had so many shocks, so many surprises in just twenty-four hours. She touched Will's face. Was he real? Or just another dream?

"Where have you been, Will?"

"Didn't you get my letters?"

"What letters?"

"Jesus, Lori, I must've sent you *hundreds* of them. You never got one?"

In an instant, Mark's words flashed through Will's mind. Mark's conspiracy thing—the whole damned Krueger deal. Maybe the town

was trying to cover it all up. Hide it. Stop Freddy, by locking away the only kids who'd been dreaming about him—the only kids who'd given him power. He grew angry.

"It's funny. All this time, I thought you didn't want to write me back. But they must've never even mailed them."

"Who?" asked Lori, having to deal with yet another shock.

"The doctors at Westin Hills."

Westin Hills?

Will turned his face to the ground. He didn't want her to see him like this, but she had to know.

"I've been in a psychiatric hospital," he said. "Mark was with me there, some other kids too."

Lori was still struggling with Westin Hills. "I don't understand."

This was no surprise to Will; he hadn't fully understood either until today. Only now was he beginning to comprehend the immense scale of the problem. Whether or not this Freddy was real, the townsfolk seemed to think so, which is why all the kids were being locked up. And Dr Campbell was at the center of all this, somehow.

Lori just had to roll with it for now. Will would tell her everything she wanted to know the moment he was certain they were out of any immediate danger.

"I saw the news the other night... the kid that was killed at your house? I needed to know that you were safe. What happened?"

"I don't know," said Lori bewildered. "We didn't see who did it. And the police have been acting weird, like they know something. I heard them mention a name—Freddy someone—but in my dreams I heard the name. Freddy Krueger."

Will's eyes opened wide at the mention of that bastard name. But his next question came straight out of nowhere.

"Where was your Dad?"

"Out of town..." Lori didn't get the connection.

"Are you sure?"

What was he getting at? Lori stared at him, wondering what his deal was. "What's going on, Will?"

Oh God oh God oh God.

Will didn't want to do this, but he had to. She had to know. It all tied in somehow. He couldn't just give her half the picture. If they didn't communicate, they could all wind up killed.

Will took a deep breath.

"See, four years ago... I thought I saw... Fuck, this is hard. I know you're never gonna believe this..."

Lori wanted the truth. Why was he asking these questions about her Dad?

"Just try me," she pressed.

Will took another deep breath.

Okay.

Let's dive straight into the deep end...

***

Hey, well whaddaya know? She must've fallen from the skies. Like an angel, man, a fucking angel!

Frisell, curly hair all over the place, leather jacket rolled up at the sleeves, waved his glowstick absently as he danced over to where she lay.

Okay, so that other chick had somehow managed to resist his magnetic charms, but she did have two mightily tasty friends who were certain to know a fine-looking hunk of man when they saw one. All night he'd kept an eye on one in particular, the foxy drunken chick in the baseball cap. But then he'd gone and lost her.

Blame it on the beer. Maybe he had been putting too much away.

Only now God had smiled on him.

He'd come out here to take a leak, and got lost. If "lost" is the right word, 'cause Frisell had stumbled on his angel: Gibb, lying on the ground... fast asleep.

She was like something from da Vinci, man. She just lay there in a frame of discarded beer cups, and her legs went on for-fucking-ever.

Frisell scoped the lay of the land.

He could see a good twenty feet thanks to the glowsticks he'd pinned all over himself all evening—roughly one every ten minutes at last count. But he still found it hard to make sense of anything; the

corn kept swaying like the fucking ocean. Whatever. He didn't think anybody was out there.

Out there? Get it?

Rubbing the side of his addled head, he staggered over to Gibb.

Whoa.

The way she was flinching and kicking, she either had a taser up her ass, or she was having a real bad dream.

***

Scrreeeechhhh!

She was in a boiler room. How the hell did she get there? More importantly, how was she going to get back out?

Scrreeeechhhh!

There was that horrible noise again. It was like someone scraping the world's worst fingernails down the world's worst blackboard.

Gibb didn't know that the awful screeching was actually the sound of metal knives on rusted boiler pipes.

This was Krueger's favorite bit... the chase. Oh the fear it created, the lovely, lovely fear.

Scrreeeechhhh!

The sound was getting closer.

So she ran. She didn't know where she was going, or where the exit was, but she knew that she had to get away from that terrifying noise.

What the fu—

The walls. They were moving, stretching like sheets of elastic, showing the prowling form of a man as if someone was crawling inside them. The pipes as well...

The place was a boiler room—a fucking boiler room!—it was all metal, it shouldn't move like that.

"*Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!*"

"You're the one that killed Trey!" Gibb shouted.

Her words echoed around the boiler room. She couldn't see who was after her, but she knew who it had to be.

The walls were still now, normal once more.

Something threw a shadow across the wall behind Gibb. It was the shadow of a gangling man wearing a distinctive, old-fashioned hat—a fedora. And he seemed to have very long fingers on one hand.

"Forget about my errand boy," growled Freddy from his hiding place.

Gibb turned and ran. She ran as hard as she could, but the place was like a maze. There were walls and pipes all around her. And no matter how fast she ran, she kept seeing glimpses of her stalker. He seemed to be everywhere. It wasn't possible.

"The only thing you have to fear..." came the voice of Krueger as he leapt out right in front of her, "is fear himself!"

Gibb screamed—sweet music for Freddy to drink in. This is what he'd been waiting for. This made all the years in Hell worthwhile.

Bathed in a repellent red light, Krueger savored the moment, then let the bitch go running and screaming away down the metal walkway.

They just didn't get it, did they?

***

"Ow, kickin'!"

Frisell was now lying next to Gibb on the ground, and as she fled from Freddy in her dreams, her sleeping body twitched and jerked on the soil of the cornfield.

Frisell positioned himself where Gibb's shaking legs could take best effect.

"All the fun one man can stand without batteries," he laughed.

Then he leaned across and kissed Gibb on the cheek. She stank of beer and cigarettes.

"Awesome..."

***

The catwalk took Gibb past a series of lockers, which is where she stopped. Running was getting her nowhere fast. Quickly, she opened a locker and slipped inside. Then quietly, ever so quietly, she closed

the locker door, and looked out through three slits at head height, comprising an air vent. She didn't have to wait long.

The moment she heard Freddy's shoes clang on the metal floor, Gibb held back on the heavy breathing. Then she saw him.

Freddy.

Gibb held her breath for as long as she could see that ugly bastard deep-pan face through the locker vents. Her lungs were on the point of bursting when he finally stepped out of view.

Phew!

Gibb got her breath back, trying desperately to contain the sound of her gasping. When she was done, she slowly moved up to the slits in the door.

She peered left: nothing.

Then right: nothing.

She reached for the door—and Freddy's face burst into view, filling the three horizontal gaps in the metal panel.

But he was upside down!

Gibb screamed and threw herself against the back of the locker interior, her eyes not able to believe what they were seeing as Freddy's face turned clockwise, rotating like a wheel, until finally his foul features were the right way up.

She was trapped.

His strength returning, Freddy threw open the door of the locker and began to pull back his razor claw for the kill... when blood spurted over the pockmarks and scars of his flame—ravaged face.

Gibb was already bleeding!

She had a wound. In her stomach. Blood was spreading across the belly of Gibb's shirt, and she started to cough up gouts of scarlet-rich internal fluid, her eyes uncomprehending. He hadn't touched her. He hadn't...

Right before Freddy Krueger's very eyes, Gibb slowly began to disappear.

"Noooo!" he bellowed. Then he lunged forward and slashed at her fading form with the five knives on his fingers. But he was only slicing thin air.

"I had you!" he raged. "You were mine!"

Krueger dived into the cabinet and hacked at the empty space like his death depended on it.

NINE

Frisell and Gibb were dead.

They had been pigstuck to the ground by the cutting rod from the cornpicking machine. Jason had impaled them both while Frisell had been lying on top of Gibb, rubbing his groin on her. Now they both lay bloodied and dead, the rusted shaft passing through Frisell's back, into Gibb's stomach, and then out Gibb's back into the soil. They were locked in an unholy coupling of bad dreams and dry humping.

It was this merciless harpooning that had snatched Gibb from Freddy Krueger's nightmare world. Krueger had been unwittingly thwarted by the unstoppable locomotive of death named Jason Voorhees.

Jason stopped for a moment to twist the long steel skewer. He shook it, almost curiously, so that both bodies flapped about like scarecrows—scarecrows with realistic entrails. When he was done, he tried to pull the rod free.

Gibb slipped back and flopped onto the ground, but the rod had somehow got jammed between the vertebrae of Frisell's spine.

Jason pulled and jiggled the metal shaft, but he could not shake Frisell loose. And Frisell was still alive!

Oh man, too much beer, I feel *awful*...

Frisell groaned...

Giving Jason all the impetus he needed to lift Frisell high up on the end of the rod like a bale of hay ready for the back of the harvester. He then flipped Frisell back over his head, tossing him with such force that the raver flew off the end of the spear as if launched from a catapult. Jason watched Frisell's glowsticks are through the night sky like a shooting star of ill omen.

***

"This Everclear is kicking my ass," Shack declared with profound appreciation. Although they'd entirely missed the event, he and his

team-mates were standing quite close to where Frisell had just landed with bone-breaking force. The guys had been drinking all night, and were now gathered on the edge of the clearing, beneath the glow of a tiki torch.

Shack smiled as he watched the blissed-out crowd doing its thing. Oh man, the babes.

"Check out this fucking guy."

Shack's buddy had seen Jason walk out into the clearing. He called out, "Hey, buddy, you can have Right Tackle, Center, Guard—any fucking slot you want."

But Shack was not so impressed by Jason. The big fat fuck was dressed in fucking rags—sackcloth or something. And what gives with the mask? There's no way Freeburg sent any invites down to Buttfuck, Texas.

"Hey! Jethro!" shouted Shack, as he swaggered over to Pamela Voorhees's only son. "This is a rave, not a Halloween party. Go find a pig to fuck."

This got a big laugh.

"Yeah," added one of Shack's gang. "Invite only... cornpoke."

This got another big laugh, enough of a laugh to inspire the lunkhead to step in front of Shack, and start prodding Jason on the chest.

"And you..."

Prod.

"... weren't..."

Prod.

...invited!"

Prod.

The jock looked up into Jason's hockey mask.

Jason looked back.

"Agghhh!"

Jason trod with his heavy black boot on the kid's foot; not to hurt the kid as such, but to pin him in place so that he could grab the kid's head in both hands and then twist the fat-mouthed fucker from the neck up, until he was staring at his friends behind him.

Now it was Jason's turn to do the jabbing.

He prodded mister one-hundred-and-eighty-degree head in the chest, removed his boot, and watched as the boy fell dead to the ground. Taking no more than five seconds in total.

"Sonofa-*bitch!*" roared Shack. This redneck shitwad had gone way beyond the limit.

Shack tossed his drink into Jason's face, then reached for a nearby tiki torch and jabbed the open paraffin flame into Voorhees's chest.

Jason immediately burst into flame—like this hadn't been tried before...

"Yeahhh! Burn motherfucker!"

But Jason didn't writhe.

He didn't twist.

He didn't turn.

He didn't run.

Jason Voorhees slowly unsheathed the machete from his belt and strode calmly towards Shack.

It was impossible!

He was on fire!

Yeah, it was dark, you could see the flame all over him.

Why wasn't he screaming?

Why wouldn't he fall over?

Why...

The machete swung upwards.

Ruuuunnnnnn!!!

***

Shack ran for his life, only to find that his team-mates had quit the scene already. He was on his own. The boy decided to head out into the cornfield. If he stayed anywhere near the lights, the fucking retard would see him. But out here, among the cornstalks, he'd be hidden. That bastard, on the other hand—you could see the glow from his burning body anyplace.

So how come he couldn't shake the freak off?

Shack stumbled and tripped as he ran, panic-stricken, through the field. Why wouldn't the guy just die and stay dead? Why wouldn't he

burn?

Shack cut a chaotic, zigzagging path through the corn, but Jason kept in a perfect straight line, almost as if he knew exactly where the chase would ultimately come to its bloody end. And as Jason walked, he left a trail of fire behind him.

The corn, dry from a good season of sunny weather, was catching alight like paper. And the fire was spreading.

Shack ran.

Left.

No, no, right.

He…

Jason was close.

No.

Left.

No, that way!

Jason raised his machete arm.

Gotta run, gotta keep moving. Gotta keep…

Jason flung the machete in one smooth motion.

The blade cut through the air like an arrow, cleaving a straight clean line of turbulence through the corn until at last…

THWOCCKK!

The machete buried itself deep in Shack's back.

The machete was on fire.

Shack screamed as the flames spread across his shirt—and whimpered as Jason withdrew the machete, knelt down over the young boy, and brutally hacked his body to pieces.

Thwocckk.

Thwocckk.

Thwocckk.

***

Jason cocked his hockey mask up from the dismembered remains and glanced over in the direction of the party.

He remembered the girls. The ones he had come for. One of them was dead, but two remained.

Then he moved.

Jason's heavy, regular steps pummeled the soil into submission. He pushed his way through the tall cornstalks like they weren't there, setting fire to them in his juggernaut wake.

Six steps further, and the masked killer broke through into the clearing and the rave. The flaring strobes lit up his mask in fragmented slivers of light and dark. To his left, three lines of kids were refreshing their cups at the beer kegs. But one sight of the walking psychotic inferno, and the ravers screamed and ran for their miserable lives. All except one: Rich.

Whatever Freeburg had given him, it had some serious fucking mojo. Rich took one look at Jason and roared with admiration. "Dude! Burning man! Awesome."

Jason swung his machete at a fleeing girl.

K-CHANG-Fsssssssssssssssssss.

Missed.

Instead, the deadly blade had hacked a gash in one of the pressurized beer cans, causing the liquid to spray up into the air. The fluid shot out with such force, that it covered Voorhees, and put out the fire.

Rich filled his cup from one of the undamaged kegs. This shit was just way too happening.

"Bow down to the wicker man, dudes! Bow down..."

Or in Rich's case, fall down, as Jason's machete smashed through his stupid floppy hat and split his head in two. Blood trickled down the center of Rich's forehead, ran down his nose, and trickled into his fresh cup of beer.

"Bummer..."

Then he was gone.

***

Jesus, there's a fucking maniac on the loose!

Everyone scattered in all directions.

Mostly people ran back to where their wheels were parked, but some of the ravers headed off in other directions; either they wanted

to get out of the light, or they were just too damned close to Jason. Whatever the reason and whichever the direction, the party exploded with panic.

The moment Lori and Kia first caught sight of the hockey mask, the sheer size of the killer, his bulk, his ragged clothes besmirched with gravedust, his enormous fucking machete—the moment Lori and Kia first caught sight of all this, they knew they were in big trouble.

This couldn't be a coincidence. It had to be tied in to the deaths of their friends—either that or Springwood had just become host to an international psycho convention, and the organizers had forgot to tell anybody.

Teenagers, adults, men, women, everyone—they all ran screaming, trying to run as fast as they could, to get away from the freak with the blade.

Lori and Kia had originally made for Kia's jeep, but Will grabbed hold of Lori's arm and nodded in the direction of his van. Almost immediately, and without saying a word, the two girls agreed that it would be best if they all just stuck together. But where was...

Lori fell.

Will had taken a straight line path back towards the van, cutting through the cornstalks, and in the darkness Lori had tripped over something lying on the ground.

A scarecrow?

No.

"Gibb!"

Lori was lying right on top of the bloody carcass of her childhood friend. Gibb...

Lying there. Her eyes open, staring. Dead. Her clothes soaked with blood. Dead. Skewered. Speared. Gibb. Dead. Partying, Drunk. So alive. So vivacious. Gibb as a child. Her first schoolyard fight. So... dead.

Lori's tears mingled with the blood on Gibb's face. She could never know that her friend had been the simultaneous victim of two bastard maniacs from Hell—a victim whose tombstone should read: Here Lies Gibb—Tortured in dreams, Butchered in life.

"Oh my God, noooo!"

Lori knew it was useless, but she grabbed Gibb by the shoulders, and shook her, hoping desperately for a spark of life. But as much as Lori wept, and as hard as she shook, Gibb remained dead.

More screams and shouts of terror came from what only two minutes ago had been the dance zone.

This was all the encouragement Kia needed.

She too had been horrified by Gibb's discovery, but Kia was practical, a survivor. And the way she saw it, it was: run now, cry later.

Surprised by her own strength, Kia grabbed hold of Lori and practically dragged her to her feet.

Immediately, Lori knew this was the right thing to do. Kia was correct. Gibb was gone, there was nothing they could do for her now. They would have to call the cops and get someone out there, before there could be any hope of retrieving Gibb's remains.

Will was already ahead of them. He'd barely glanced at the body before running in the direction of the van. By the time he got there, the ravers had already scattered. They were in their cars and tearing off in all directions—road, corn, whatever, they just hit the gas and drove for their fucking lives.

A beat-up old convertible swung around and missed Will by inches as he threw open the van door. He climbed aboard, and looked back. Kia and Lori were running as fast as they could.

"Get in!" he shouted. "Hurry!"

Like the girls really needed motivation.

***

Linderman had watched Lori flee.

For one ridiculous moment he'd considered standing up to the burning gatecrasher, to show Lori how brave he could be. But every which way Linderman visualized the confrontation, it ended with that machete in his face.

His legs had a better idea. He was running before he'd even realized it, and in no time at all he was back in the saddle of his

scooter.

Kick-start.

Nothing.

Again.

Zero.

And again!

Nix.

And again!

Nada.

Every time Linderman kicked the damned stupid thing, all he got was a pathetic whir followed by a totally annoying silence.

"C'mon baby!" he urged.

He tried again, almost crapping himself with fear.

At the back of his mind, Linderman was faintly aware that he was suddenly the living, breathing embodiment of a cliché from a thousand bad horror movies: the vehicle that wouldn't start.

But this wasn't post-modern, or ironic—*it was fucking terrifying!*

"C'mon..."

Over his shoulder, he could hear breaking glass, screams—the moist chudding of machete hitting soft tissue.

He looked back.

"Oh God, please..."

Jason was heading right for him. Grim. Determined. Resolute. Dressed to kill.

"This isn't how the Linderman story is supposed to end!"

It was a neat narrative, very self-aware, but the powers that be were not listening. Linderman hit the kick—start over and over, but all he got for his efforts were the powerless grinding sounds of an obstinate mechanical bastard. Linderman was going nowhere.

Just a short way ahead of him, Will hit the ignition of Mark's van. He was just about to get the hell out of there, when Freeburg ran up and banged on the side of the vehicle. Freeburg was as close to panic as a drugged-out sap-brain could be.

"Hey, dude!" he shouted, the flat of his hand banging on the van like a drum. "Lemme in! C'mon!"

Will didn't pay Freeburg any attention, but Lori did. She threw open one of the doors, letting Freeburg dive inside. As he did, Lori looked out over his shoulder, and saw Linderman working desperately to get the engine of his scooter started.

She could also see the huge maniac in the hockey mask. He was only a couple of long, powerful steps away from Linderman.

"Linderman!" Lori shouted. "This way!"

But the guy couldn't hear her.

Even if he hadn't been deafened by the cries of screaming teenagers and the roar of fleeing engines, Linderman would still have been lost in a world of his own—a world in which he could get the damned thing to start through sheer willpower alone. The Linderman story would not end this way.

"Start, start, start, start, start..."

Which was as close to praying as Linderman had come since kindergarten.

Vroooooommm!!

Yes! The goddamn little bastard scooter was engaged. Linderman gunned the throttle and got... nowhere. Why wasn't he moving? Dirt was being kicked up by his wheels.

Linderman looked back.

Jason was holding the end of the scooter with just one hand. In his other hand, he held the machete.

Very slowly, very deliberately, Jason lifted the machete in a sweeping arc until it was poised high over Linderman's head and neck.

Linderman was frozen in time, his engine revving with insufficient power, his body surging forward over the handlebars, trying to force the bike forward, but going nowhere—held by Jason, and rocking like some cheap plastic action figure with fucked batteries.

It was useless.

Linderman closed his eyes. Calm. Okay, so he was the guy in the red shirt who didn't make it to the end of the episode. So what? You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.

Unexpectedly feeling a wisdom beyond his years, and way beyond his self-perception as school geek, Linderman closed his eyes even

tighter and braced himself for the storm.

"I regret nothing," he whispered.

Any moment now...

Whammm!

What the hell was that?

No pain. No blood, just that massive dull thud.

The back of Linderman's scooter fell away, pitching Linderman forward. But he managed to keep enough footing to stand up and see that Will had reversed the van straight into Jason, knocking the crazy fucker to the ground.

What gives with this guy's skin? It looks all gray, black—like a zombie or something?

As Jason lay on the ground, recovering his strength, the van jerked to a halt, engine still running.

Linderman was almost dazed when he saw the van doors burst open. He was still pretty out of it when Freeburg scrambled out and dragged him inside.

Lori and Kia were already in there, and the guy driving the van was the one the cops were after, the one he'd seen talking to Lori at school today.

As soon as Linderman was safely aboard, Will put pedal to the metal, and caned it like fuck out of the cornfield.

***

Jason stood up.

He watched the red taillights of the van as Will sped his friends safely into the distance.

He could smell smoke.

He could feel the heat of the fire.

He could hear the groans of some of the people he'd hacked his way through.

The cornfield was ablaze.

The rave was a scene of carnage.

The sound system was still pounding hard and heavy beats.

Some of the party lights were still shining.

This had been a good night out, but the fun wasn't over yet.

Jason had found and killed the girl who had thrown the cigarette into his face, but her friends were still alive.

They had run screaming out of that house where he had killed the boy in the bed. Then they had returned, bringing lots of people with them. Then, they went to that place in the daylight with too many kids and other people. And now, they had driven out to this place, where he had finally caught up with them.

He had killed one of them, but the others had escaped—they had fled with new friends, new people, fresh victims in a viral chain of slaughterhouse contamination.

As long as his victims reached out to more people for help, Jason would always have fresh bodies to slay.

But these two... the two girls—the pale one and the dark one—they were different. And they had escaped him.

But it didn't matter.

No matter where they ran to.

No matter where they hid.

Jason would keep on coming.

And coming.

And coming.

Until they were dead.

Jason Voorhees calmly looked round at the chaos he had brought down upon the cornfield, and was master of all he surveyed.

TEN

They were all silent, too shocked, too numb, too confused to talk.

Gibb was dead.

Only Freeburg felt any appreciation for the funky lighting in the back of the van. In fact, the interior design of the vehicle had inspired him to roll up a joint. What the hey, they were still at least half an hour from town.

Kia and Linderman were totally frazzled, Linderman almost at breaking point. For one brief moment back there, he'd accepted death, he'd faced his own mortality. Lori was crying quietly. Trey. Blake. Gibb.

Gibb!

Will kept his eyes on the road.

A black and white Misfits air freshener hung from the rear-view mirror. It was made of flat plastic but its vanilla smell had faded years ago. Bobby had had strange tastes, but Will could have smiled if it wasn't for what had been happening. Now the dumb ornament seemed to be mocking them, swaying back and forth from the rear-view, as if the van was somehow marked for death. Only voodoo ain't about death; it's about living death.

"Was that him?" asked Kia in the back of the van, freaking. "The guy you were talking about? Freddy Krueger?"

Lori shook her head. "That wasn't the guy from my dream. That was someone else."

Linderman couldn't believe this shit.

"Who cares about some fucking dream guy?" he shouted. "That psycho in the hockey mask was *real!*"

Freeburg flipped the joint between his lips, and tried to light it but his hands were shaking too much.

"Dude. That goalie was pissed about something," he said as he finally sparked the roll-up.

No one disagreed.

It was all too much to take in. Forget the murders, what about the guy in the hockey mask? If he wasn't this Freddy Krueger, who was

he? And how did he manage to survive being set on fire? And how was he so strong? And why was he wearing that mask? And his skin…

Kia took the cell phone out from her bag. "We need to find the police."

"Fuck the police!" shouted Linderman. "Just get… me…home!"

The poor guy had lost it.

But Kia had a point. A lot of people had been attacked and killed back there, and the whole field was going up in smoke. Someone had to do something about it, but the five of them sure as hell couldn't!

Will disagreed. He was still on the run from Westin Hills, so he didn't want to get involved with the cops. Nor did Freeburg, not with all the gear he had stashed on his person.

Most surprising of all, Lori didn't want Kia to call the police either. Lori had seen something, had sensed something, that night at the police station. There was something wrong about Sheriff Williams—the way he had treated her after Trey's murder. Right now, Springwood's finest didn't fill Lori with confidence.

So, despite Kia's protests, they all decided to leave it to someone else to call the cops.

They would just lie low, get people home, and then decide what the hell to do.

And they *had* to do something. Too many kids were dying in Springwood right now.

***

It was raining when they arrived back in Elm Street. Just like the previous night—the night Trey and Blake got killed.

Will had already dropped Linderman and Freeburg off near their homes. Linderman was a wreck, and Freeburg probably was as well, underneath all the weed-induced fug.

The van pulled to a quick stop beneath a streetlight. Rain trickled down the windscreen, the wipers not doing much to clear the glass. Will left the engine running. Lori was now sitting beside him in the passenger seat.

It was Kia's stop. She stepped out of the van, and oblivious to the downpour came round to the passenger door, where she and Lori hugged.

Raindrops mingled with the tears on both their faces. Kia was letting it all out.

"Gibb..." she said haltingly. "I can't believe she..."

"I know, I know..." replied Lori.

They broke free.

Kia wiped at her running mascara. "Call me later, okay? Please? Just to check in?"

Lori nodded, smiling. Will looked away, so not to intrude on the moment as Kia turned and began to walk away. For a moment it looked as if Kia was going to stop and say something, but she checked herself and hurried off into the rainy night.

Lori closed the door of the van.

Save for the idling of the engine, and the pattering of rain on the roof and windshield, the two of them sat in silence. It had been too much for them. Both Will and Lori had been on this incredible journey, a journey that had started long before Trey's murder.

Will had been dating Lori some time before he saw her Dad kill her Mom. And then he'd been institutionalized, locked away inside Westin Hills.

His parents had said he was sick; the doctors said he was sick. He wrote letters to Lori but she never replied. He wasn't allowed to call her. They said he was delusional, that he'd imagined seeing Dr Campbell kill his wife. And then he made friends with Mark, a kid who, just like him, was trapped in Westin Hills for no good reason. Mark's brother, Bobby, had killed himself, soon after which Mark had started having nightmares. But since when had anybody needed psychiatric treatment for nightmares?

And now, having escaped to see if Lori was okay, Will had seen everything blown wide open.

Lori's friends had been murdered. Lori had had the exact same nightmares as Will's brother, Bobby. Some weird guy, this Krueger, who Lori had seen in her dreams, was supposed to be real. They couldn't find any evidence about him over at the library, but

according to Mark, Krueger was some kind of serial killer who'd died years ago. What was Mark saying? What was Lori saying?

Fred Krueger, this psycho, gets torched but somehow lives on in people's nightmares? They're saying he's some kinda ghost?

It sounded like a crock of shit.

Mark said Krueger used nightmares to frighten and kill his victims, which somehow gave him strength. And that's where Mark's conspiracy theory came from. He guessed the authorities had it all figured out, which was why they rounded up every kid who was having the Krueger nightmares. They rounded the kids up, then doped them on Hypnocil to stop them all from dreaming. No nightmares, no Krueger.

But if—and it was a very *big* if—all this bullshit was true, then who the fuck was the zombie with the machete? And just who had killed Trey and Blake?

Krueger? The hockey mask zombie guy? Or someone else?

Christ, the whole thing was beginning to sound like one huge bad dream.

***

Lori had this entire problem in reverse.

Her Mom dies and Will just takes off. Just when Lori needs Will the most, he leaves her, vanishes.

Then he turns up, years later, with some crazy story about having being locked away in an asylum.

He supposedly wrote her letters she never got. And he had this friend, this intense guy who somehow knew what Lori had been dreaming. It was all too weird.

And the cops—they seemed to be plotting something, almost as if the kids were the problem, not the killers.

And killers?

Yes, killers plural?

If Krueger was real, then who was the freak at the rave? Who killed Trey and Blake, and why were the police pretending Blake had done it and then committed suicide?

It was too much to take in. Too much in too little time.

These last two days had been…

Who could she trust?

"Can you take me home now," Lori said, a command rather than a request.

Her house was only half a block down the street. She could just about see it through the torrents pouring down the windshield.

"I think that's the last place you should go right now."

"Will, *please*. After what we saw tonight… I just need to…"

Will looked her in the face. He didn't want to tell her, but she had to know. She had to understand why he'd been away all this time. She had to know how it all tied in.

"There's more to it than that," he said. He seemed agitated. It was now or never. "Look," he sighed, "I tried to tell you this earlier. The reason I was sent to Westin…"

He couldn't go through with it.

He had to. Deep breath.

"It's because… I saw your Dad kill your Mom."

No.

No way. No… no…

Lori stared at Will, horrified. After everything she'd… after… Gibb… Trey… after… no… she…

"Will…" She felt her mind losing its grip.

She had to assert herself. She had to bring it all back under control.

"My Mom died in a car accident."

Will shook his head, adamant. "That's what he wanted you to believe. But I was there, Lori. I saw it."

Who was he talking about, thought Lori? That's what *who* wanted me to belie—

Whunk-whunk-whunk!

They both jumped out of their skins and yelped uncontrollably.

Someone had hammered on the windshield. Loud. Insistent. Someone with a flashlight. The beam swept through the front of the van as the person holding it walked around to the passenger side and yanked at the door.

The door handle rattled.

In the darkness and the heavy downpour, Lori and Will couldn't see who it was—and the flashlight blinded them. Surely it couldn't be the guy in the hockey mask?

The door rattled again.

Lori shrank in her seat, her back pressed against Will, who was bracing himself for action. The engine was still running. All he had to do was—

The passenger door was thrown open, letting in a flurry of wind and rain.

"Get out of the car, Lori!"

It was Dr Campbell. Her father. Campbell was standing there in the rain, flashlight in one hand, umbrella in the other.

Campbell—the guy Will had just called a murderer.

Campbell—accused of killing his own wife, Lori's Mom.

He put the flashlight in his umbrella hand, and quickly grabbed hold of his daughter's arm.

"Dad? What—"

He ignored her question and pulled her out of the van, tugging her under the feeble protection of the umbrella. He could see she'd been crying. She looked distressed, tired.

"Where have you been, honey?" He had to talk loud to be heard over the rainfall. "I've been looking all over for you."

And he had. Lori could tell because he was dressed in the severe dark suit he always wore to work. Only now it was soaked through with rain water.

"Get away from her!"

Will!

He had rushed out of the van and was now grabbing Lori's arm. There was no way he was going to let her leave with that man.

Campbell had other ideas: "Will Rollins... you're in a hell of a lot of trouble. You know that, don't you?"

Will was defiant. "Like I give a shit any more!"

Before she knew it, Lori was caught in the middle of a fierce argument between the only two men she'd ever loved.

Campbell stepped away from his daughter, and moved. closer to Will. "Just calm down. Let me take you back to the hospital and we'll sort all this out."

The first mention of Westin Hills sent Will into a desperate panic. "No way!" he shouted. "No way!" Then to Lori, "You can't trust him, Lori. Whatever you do, don't go home with him."

But Lori didn't know what to do, who to trust.

"Will, I..." Anguish creased her young, beautiful face.

There was only one thing for it; Will had to make her mind up for her.

He tried to reach for Lori, but Campbell dropped the umbrella and flashlight and reached out for Will with both arms, grabbing him, restraining him, pinning the young man's arms to his side, like a straitjacket.

"Listen to me, Lori!" shouted Will, the rain pouring down his tortured expression. "He was the one who had me committed!"

Lori couldn't believe what she was hearing. She looked to see her father's reaction, but Campbell was too busy wrestling with one of his official, medical patients.

"For your own good, Will," he panted. "You don't know what you're saying. You're confused. You always have been."

Will continued to struggle, but Campbell had him fast.

Lori's world was turning upside down, inside out and vomiting. They were fighting. Her Dad had locked Will away. All this time, and he knew. Her own father knew...

"Stop it! Both of you!" she shouted.

"Get away from me!" cried Will, grappling with the older man. "Get away from me!"

But Dr Campbell was a fully grown man, while Will was just a boy. Campbell used all the strength in his bulky frame to grab hold of him and slam him up against the van.

"Damn it, Will! I'm not going to let you endanger my daughter again, you hear me? Not after everything that's happened!"

Endanger?

Campbell then moved to pin Will against the van. Which cut Will enough space to twist free and hurl a badly timed punch flat across

Campbell's broad nose. But what Will lacked in technique, he made up for in force. Camp bell's nose spat red. It wasn't broken, but the little bastard had...

Campbell quickly recovered from the surprise of the attack and got ready to...

A cop car came sweeping round the corner of Elm Street, locking the three of them in its headlights. Campbell couldn't hit the boy now, not in full view of... Let the police handle it. Lock him up, then sedate him. Make it official.

The doctor was still considering his options when Will ducked out of his reach and made for the driving seat of the van. Campbell went after him, but too late. Will leapt in, shot the van into reverse than gunned the vehicle, tires squealing in the rain, off down the street.

There was a dry patch on the road where the van had been standing. Almost immediately, the patch was covered by the police car as it came screeching to a halt, splashing water over onto the sidewalk.

It was Sheriff Williams. He rolled down the window then called out to Campbell, "You alright?"

Campbell nodded. He was through wasting time. He just pointed at his bloody nose, then waved a weary hand in the direction of the van.

"Will Rollins," he confirmed, gasping.

Will Rollins!

Sheriff Williams hit the lights, then went speeding after Will's van, the sound of police sirens tearing a hole through the breaking of the storm.

As the police car went racing down Elm Street, something struck Lori for the first time. Something about Sheriff Williams and her father. Two men, roughly the same age, both with lined faces, both with graying hair, both tall and heavily set. When the Sheriff had spoken to her father in the kitchen yesterday, they'd seemed to share a common language. Both men seemed haunted by the same dark secret.

***

Inside 1428 Elm Street a few minutes later, Lori found herself becoming ever more disturbed. She had never seen her Dad like that before. Fighting. And he'd admitted—only now, only when forced—that Will had been one of his patients.

Dr Campbell had lied to Lori.

And what about Will's story? Could Dr Campbell really have killed Lori's Mom? Where did her father's lies end?

Dr Campbell closed the front door and walked into the living room.

Lori sat down on the couch, shell-shocked, soaked to the bone but uncaring. Rain continued to beat down on the windows, on the roof, and thunder rumbled ominously overhead. It felt as if the whole world was shaking.

And Campbell...

Doctor Campbell...

He stood there in the dimly lit living room, wet, disheveled, nose still bleeding. He looked haggard, and she could see him breathing fast, his heart racing. He looked desperate. Cornered. Like a...

A killer?

"Lori, I—"

Lori cut him off. "Did Mom die in a car accident?" she asked sharply.

"Of course she did, honey."

Lori turned to look right into his eyes. She needed to know the truth. In two days her entire life—everything she thought she knew—had turned to shit. Now she had to start rebuilding. She had to put a new life back together again, a life based on truth instead of lies. She didn't know what this new life would be, but she really had no choice. Time to lay the first brick.

"Prove it," she demanded of her bedraggled father. "Show me the death certificate. Show me an autopsy report."

Campbell walked over to her, tried to reach for her. "I really don't think now's the time to..."

Lori brushed him aside and got up from the sofa. He took another step forward. She backed away.

"Oh I think now's the perfect time," she said, almost accusingly. Then she drove the stake right home.

"Why don't you tell me about Westin Hills, Dad? Do you work there? Because I thought you were a fucking *general practitioner!*"

Lori was shouting now, upset. Campbell was hardly in a rush to defend himself, to prove she was wrong.

"Yes," he offered, "I do some consulting at Westin. But it's not what you—"

Oh God.

"So you knew where Will was the whole time?"

Tears flooded Lori's eyes. She could see his shoulders sag. She knew she was right. She knew!

"Listen to me, Lori." Unbelievable! That voice—suddenly he was talking to her like she was one of his patients. "You're upset. We both are. What you need, more than anything right now, is some rest."

He reached into his sodden jacket pocket and pulled out a small bottle of pills—Hypnocil.

"Let me give you something to help you sleep," he uncapped the bottle. "Then we can talk in the—"

"I don't want to sleep, Dad," Lori interjected. "I want to know why you've been lying to me."

But Campbell wasn't listening. She needed sleep. He had medication. He could control the situation. It was routine.

"We'll talk in the morning, Lori," he said forcefully, tipping two of the pills into his hand. "Now just do what I say."

Lori shook her head. She wanted answers from her Dad, not damn pills. First he'd fought with Will, and now this. Lori turned abruptly and ran up the stairs. The stairs were firm, solid—she had no trouble reaching her room in double-quick time.

Campbell ran after her. "Lori!"

Goddamn it, his daughter... all he had left.

Lori slammed the bedroom door hard in his face, and locked it.

He shook the door handle. And knocked. And tried the door handle again and again.

"Lori, open this door right now! Honey!"

"Get away from me!"

Lori was angry, sad, frightened, confused, upset, betrayed. Why won't he shut up and leave her alone?

Dr Campbell kept shouting, rattling the door, barging at it with his shoulder.

No!

Lori was terrified. She clicked on the CD player, and turned it up real loud. She didn't want to hear her father anymore, his banging, his shouting. Like a child, she hoped if she drowned out the noise, the problem would go away. But it wouldn't, and Lori was terrified.

Terrified of her own father.

Terrified of this Krueger guy, and the psycho at the cornfield.

Terrified of the murders.

Terrified of the truth about Will.

But terrified of her own Dad?

She jammed the back of a wooden chair under the door handle.

Bwhamm!

He was ramming the door. Her Dad was throwing himself against her bedroom door! He was trying to break it down, trying to force it, to force his way in. Her own Dad!

"Damn it, Lori! Open the goddamn door!"

Bwhamm!

Cracks started to appear in the door jamb. The whole frame was starting to give.

Lori looked around in panic.

What could she...

Where...

Bwhamm!

The window!

Lori ran over to the window and hauled it open. Wasting no time, she climbed through and, ignoring the pouring rain, got out onto the roof.

Bwhamm!

She could still hear him trying to smash an entrance into her room.

Down she went, lowering her light body down onto the rose trellis which she then climbed down to the lawn. She had barely reached

the ground and hurried over to the cover of the bushes when she heard her Dad finally break down the bedroom door.

From her hiding place, Lori could see him up in her room, pacing back and forth in impotent rage.

She nearly jumped when he thrust his face out through her bedroom window. He seemed to be looking right at her.

"Lori!" he bellowed. "Lori!"

Dr Campbell was furious. But he couldn't see her.

Sobbing with the unrelenting horror of her situation, Lori turned...

... and ran smack into a soaking wet jacket.

Strong arms pinned her and dragged her into the shelter of a nearby wall of shrubs. Lori almost screamed, but the stranger hissed in her ear: "It's okay, it's okay," Will soothed. "It's me."

Campbell was still raging and calling Lori's name. Will looked up. The sight of Campbell reminded him of...

He led Lori away, and they crept quietly off down the street until at last they were out of sight of her house.

They took cover under a tree, partly to hide from anyone who might come by, and partly to shelter from the rain. But they didn't have to wait long before the rain first eased off, then finally stopped altogether—although by then they were both soaked.

"God," Lori wept. "I just feel like my whole world's falling out from under me."

"Now you know how I felt the last four years," replied Will softly.

The last four years.

She had to know. Lori steeled herself, then seized ill's total attention.

"Tell me what you saw," she said, and Will knew exactly what she meant.

After his fight with Campbell and the near escape from Sheriff Williams, Will wasn't going to hold his punches any longer.

"I saw him kill her," he said flatly. "I was sneaking up to your room, like I used to do. Only you weren't there."

***

The memory of what he saw four years ago was the only nightmare that had ever haunted Will. Only this was a living, breathing nightmare, not some boogeyman bullshit in a colorblind sweater.

It had been a beautiful, warm fall evening, dark but with a mild breeze, and Will had been looking forward to spending some time with his girlfriend. He knew Lori's parents wouldn't want him to call so late, so he'd snuck through the yard of 1428 Elm and climbed up the rose trellis—the same trellis Lori had just used to escape her angry father.

But Will had barely reached the level of Lori's window, when he'd heard a scream. Not a playful scream, not a kid's scream or a scream from the TV: it was a full throated, terror-stricken wail of icy, mind-paralyzing horror.

The sound had frightened Will so much that he'd nearly. fallen from his window perch. Luckily he held on tight—only to have his sense of shock replaced by a deep nausea of slow unrelenting fear.

Lori's bedroom door had been open, and Will was able to see through it, across the hall, and into her parents' bedroom. He could see Mrs Campbell. She was on her bed, flailing, her chest covered in cuts. She was thrashing among the bed sheets, covered in blood, bleeding the death of a slaughtered epileptic. Lori was nowhere to be seen, but then Will saw Dr Campbell...

Campbell had stepped into view with a knife in his hand.

Will saw him walk up to his wife as she lay there convulsing, bleeding to death on their maternal bed.

Then Campbell had lunged forward with the knife; a long, sharp knife—the kind of stainless steel kitchen knife you hack up cuts of meat with.

Then, just like tonight—the night Will was telling all this to Lori—a sudden flash of lightning cut through the night sky. And it was at this precise moment that Dr Campbell had turned to stare right over at Will as the boy sat there. balanced in Lori's window frame.

Will was perfectly clear in the brilliant white light and their eyes had met. Will's eyes, the eyes of a terrified boy; Campbell's eyes, the eyes of a knife-wielding murderer, standing proud over the heaving bloody corpse of his dead wife.

***

And that was the story.

Will had fled, the cops had caught up with him, and nobody listened. Campbell signed the admittance forms, and the rest was inmate history.

But then there was Mark's story...

"I don't know how your father's connected to all of this," pondered Will. "But I think Mark was right. There's some kind of cover-up going on here with Krueger. We can't trust the police. We can't trust any of the adults."

This rang true with Lori.

She'd had her own intuitions about the police. But she was still coming to terms with what Will had said about her Dad. It couldn't be true. And even if it was, how could it be tied in with Krueger? Or the maniac at the party?

God, both Trey and her Mom had died in the same room!

She shut it out of her mind. She had to concentrate.

Whatever the answer to all this, Lori knew she couldn't fix this thing on her own. And she couldn't go back to her father. All she could do was move forward, and for now that meant working stuff out with Will. He seemed to have some idea of what was going on—which was more than she had.

"So what do we do?" asked Lori.

"We gotta get Mark," answered Will. "He's the expert on all of this."

Okay, so maybe Will didn't have all the answers after all.

Then again, Mark knew about her dream. He knew about the rhyme and the Krueger guy. Maybe Will was right. Maybe between the two of them and Mark, they could form some kind of plan. Then she could call Kia.

Huddled there under the trees, Will squeezed her hand, shaking her out of her thoughts. "I'm not gonna let anything happen to you. No matter what, I'm not leaving you again."

Lori needed to hear this. Her Dad had tried to drug her—that was his solution—but Will offered her support, strength, and maybe… love?

Lori smiled. She prayed to God that her father was wrong, and that Will and Mark weren't merely escaped lunatics.

"You're the only boy I've ever kissed. Do you know that?" she asked.

Will pretended to scowl. "Don't take this the wrong way, but I kinda hope I'm the last one too."

ELEVEN

Mark had spent the whole night alone.

His parents hadn't shown—they must be out of town—and no one had called or bothered him. A police car rolled by a couple of times, but Mark didn't see anyone watching the house full-time. So he'd just gone to his bedroom and taken a tour down memory lane. He hoped to God that Will hadn't done anything stupid. And he wanted his dead brother's van back in one piece.

Mark sat at his old desk. He hadn't used his computer, or any computer for that matter, for years. It had been a miserable night; it only stopped raining a few minutes ago.

He pulled open a drawer beside his legs and took out a framed photo. The photo was old. It showed a cute little blond kid riding on the shoulders of a handsome, dark haired young man. The cute kid was smiling. His eyes were open, warm, betraying nothing of the intensity they showed in Mark now.

Mark stroked a finger over the face of the bigger kid.

"You always looked out for me, Bobby."

Bobby. His older brother, carrying a very young Mark on his broad shoulders. Mark remembered the day the photo was taken. It was out by the shore, the place they always went on vacation.

Mark looked more closely at the image of his brother's face.

Bobby.

Closer.

Bobby winked...

What the hell?

Mark shook his head. He must have imagined...

Zwip!

The computer—Mark's computer—had turned itself on. The small green power light was on, and there was a picture on the monitor.

What's that? Streamed video or something?

It was a high angle image, like from a webcam or a closed circuit TV system—a high angle view of his own bathroom!

The image crackled, sometimes broke into squares, and occasionally locked up then jumped forward a few frames, like a live digital feed.

Someone was walking into the bathroom. A young man. Naked. But the camera was over the bathroom door, so Mark could only see the man's back as he walked forward toward the bathtub. Mark couldn't see his face. He didn't know who the young man was.

Was this a tape or a video or digital recording of some kind?

The man turned on the faucet and started to fill the bathtub with water. Then he backed out of the room.

This was freaky.

Who was it? How was this happening?

Though frightened, Mark couldn't help but watch as the action unfolded. The room looked like his bathroom—the bathroom here, in his parents' house—but he didn't know who the guy was or what...

The man walked back into view.

Again Mark couldn't see his face... but he could see that the man was now holding a straight razor.

Enough!

Mark reached under the desk and ripped the computer plug out of the wall socket.

Mark didn't know what it was all about, he didn't know how his computer had turned itself on, and he didn't give a damn. The pictures, still running on the screen, were starting to get creepy. Naked guy with a razor? Jeez!

The sound of the water running into the bathtub was pretty realistic, but... wait a fucking minute, the computer's turned off at the wall!

Mark could still hear the water running.

He leaned back on his seat, so that he could see out the bedroom, down the short hallway to the bathroom. The sound was coming from inside the bathroom. And there was steam coming out from under the bathroom door.

Had someone come home and decided to take a bath, not knowing Mark was in the house? What about the computer thing? And why didn't Mark hear anyone arrive?

Mark chewed at his bottom lip, then slowly, hesitantly got up off his seat. He walked out of the bedroom and stepped down the hall in the direction of the bathroom.

The water was getting louder, the steam thicker.

Mark could almost feel the heat and the humidity of the room as he reached for the bathroom doorknob.

He paused.

What if it was his Mom? He didn't want to catch her naked. Should he call out?

Mark took a breath, and opened the door.

The bathroom was empty.

No water in the tub.

No steam.

No naked guy.

The bathroom was empty.

Mark sighed with relief and rubbed his eyes. He must have imagined it all. The whole thing must be messing with his nerves or something. Maybe he'd been daydreaming.

"I've gotta stay awake," he told himself, trying to calm down.

Maybe there was something in the bathroom medicine cabinet that could help; he was way beyond the black coffee stage.

He walked over to the mirror-door cabinet, opened it and rummaged around until he found a bottle of No-Doze. Just what he was looking for.

Relieved, Mark started to walk away, swinging the cabinet door shut behind—

What was that?

Mark whipped round and looked at the mirror.

Just his own face. Nothing unusual.

He could've sworn for a second back there, that he'd caught sight of someone or something moving in the cabinet mirror. He was convinced he'd seen a flash of someone in a red and green sweater and a snap-brimmed hat, someone with a butt ugly face.

Wasn't that how everybody was describing Krueger?

It was getting to him.

It was his imagination.

He was tired.

But he couldn't sleep; Will could be back with the van any time.

Still, all this had shaken Mark badly. First the business with the computer, and now this. Maybe it was because he hadn't taken any Hypnocil in over twenty-four hours now.

God, what if I am just crazy after all?

Mark's eye twitched erratically as he opened the bottle of stimulants.

Shit, only one left. Still, one's better than none at all.

Mark dropped the pill out of the bottle and into his hand—where it bounced and dropped into the bathroom sink.

"Oh no!"

The pill rebounded and jumped around the basin, falling ever lower...

"No no no!"

Circling...

"No!"

Mark shot his hand out to grab the pill, but it circled in an ever tighter orbit before quickly rolling down the drain.

"Noooo!" He peered down into the basin. Shit!

And now he was standing in a puddle of warm water. Where the hell did that come from? He hadn't turned on any of the faucets.

He looked down to see if he could follow the water to its source, only it wasn't water; it was blood.

Mark was standing in a small puddle of blood, a puddle that had collected from a thin trickle that had run along the floor from the base of the bathtub.

Mark's eyes followed the line of blood up the side of the tub, until he saw the slit wrists.

Slit wrists.

The body.

Wrists.

Hanging over the side of the bathtub.

The body.

Blood dripping from suicidal slit wrists, landing drop by drop on the sheer white tiles.

The body.

It was Bobby—Mark's long dead brother.

"Oh God!" Mark whined. "I'm dreaming... I'm dreaming..."

Bobby's eyes snapped open. Dead, cadaverous eyes.

Mark whimpered as Bobby's corpse—eyes latched onto his own. When last Mark had seen Bobby's eyes it had been in the vacation photograph. Now Bobby's eyes were seeing Mark from beyond the grave.

"Hey bro... how's it going?"

Unbelievably, Bobby's voice seemed perfectly normal, natural, almost relaxed considering he was dead. But the tone, the style, didn't sound quite right. It was Bobby's voice, but the speaker seemed more spiteful, more vindictive.

"You didn't forget about me, did you?" asked the suicide.

Mark snapped. He turned to run but his bare feet were stuck to the floor.

What the fuck?

His feet were glued to the bloody puddle, a puddle that began to mutate and take form as tendrils of blood rose from the tiles and stabbed themselves like corpuscular needles into Mark's feet, pinning the terrified boy in place.

"Oh, that's right," said Bobby with attitude. "Everyone forgot. That's why they weren't afraid anymore. That's why I needed Jason to kill for me, to make them remember..."

What was his brother saying? It didn't make any sense. Jason who?

"This isn't real," Mark said determinedly. He had to wake up.

Bobby ignored him. "But now, Jason just won't stop."

"Somebody please wake me up!" cried Mark.

"Hey, didn't Mommy teach you not to talk with your mouth full?" sneered the bleeding suicide.

Something was wrong inside Mark.

Correction, something *wrong* was *inside* Mark. Something moving.

Mark bent double and began to convulse, his feet still locked in place by the pins of congealed blood. He retched once, then again.

Mark's whole frame shook as he heaved and puked, straining every muscle in his stomach wall. Tears filled his eyes as something dark and rank slithered out of his mouth. He groaned and gasped; here came another, and another. A dozen slimy, squirming black eels thrashed at his feet.

He was helpless to stop the agony. Mark folded in on himself, clutching his midriff, puking and gagging, wanting to turn himself inside out—anything to get rid of the writhing eels he was now retching all over the bathroom floor. The glistening black things wriggled down his chest, his neck, over his face, his feet. Mark was puking worms while the gloating corpse of his brother bled slowly to death in the bathtub.

"*Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!*"

***

"He's asleep."

Will was looking in through Mark's window. His friend was fast asleep, slumped awkwardly in front of his computer, head down on his desk.

"Mark!" Will tapped lightly on the window.

He and Lori had driven straight over, but the last thing Will expected to find was his friend asleep.

Will tried again.

"Mark!"

***

Bobby sat up in the tub. The voice wasn't his brother's anymore; it was low, growling, guttural.

"I need your help, Mark. I'd do the job on Jason myself but that sonofabitch just won't sleep!"

Mark was still doubled over, weighed down inside a mess of black writhing shit.

Bobby rose and got slowly up out of the tub, naked, bleeding, spraying fine red jets of spent life over his bare chest and thighs. When Bobby next spoke, it was with the voice of Freddy Krueger.

"I *own* you... I own all of you! You're *my* children, not Jason's!"

Mark cringed, groveling and writhing before the feet of his dead brother. Finally he understood. It was never Bobby, it had never been Bobby. From the moment his computer had turned itself on, everything had all been Freddy fucking Krueger.

"No!" Mark screamed. "I won't do it! I won't do it!"

Bobby chuckled menacingly, then strode towards Mark.

As Bobby moved, his bare arms and legs started to bubble and burn. Mark looked up in horror as smoke began to rise from his brother's skin, almost as if—impossibly—his brother was on fire from inside his own body. But it wasn't Bobby.

Jesus!

A nauseating smell of burnt flesh filled Mark's nostrils as the scalding form of his naked brother came closer and closer. The skin blistered. The blisters burned. The skin scarred over, wept pus, bled, shriveled, burned. The body... it became Freddy Krueger.

"You won't do it?" Krueger snarled mockingly. "Then pass along a little message for me."

Freddy seized hold of Mark, pulled him up from the floor—ripping his feet free of the blood pincers—then hurled the boy up against the bathroom ceiling. Mark hit the ceiling hard, and stayed there!

Mark started howling: "Somebody wake me up! Please! Please!"

It was as if his body had been glued to the ceiling, his stomach pressed hard against the plaster, leaving his back vulnerable to the dream killer beneath. Mark strained, turned his head, to try to look down at Freddy.

"Agghhhh!"

Mark's shirt exploded into flames then fell away, leaving the fair skin of his back completely and utterly exposed.

Freddy fanned out the fingers of his razor glove, looked up at Mark's knotted spine and smiled.

Showtime!

***

"Mark!"

Will and Lori pulled hard at the window but it refused to budge. Inside, smoke was starting to rise from Mark's sleeping body. He just lay at his desk, smoldering. Their friend was on fire.

"Marrrrk!" shouted Will, as he tried to break open the tough window frame.

***

Mark cried out in agony. His whole back was on fire. Gritting his teeth against the pain, he craned his neck. twisting it as far as it would go, to try to see what was happening.

He could make out letters, yes letters. He had been branded in some way. There were words on his back, but he couldn't make them out because not only could he not see the entire words, but also the letters were written backwards...

***

Mark sat bolt upright behind the desk and screamed. Then he leapt to his feet, and began clawing at the blazing shirt on his back.

Will and Lori looked on in horror as Mark jerked and threw himself around the room before falling out of view. They had to help him! Will looked around frantically for something... anything...

A rock was lying in the damp earth a few paces away.

With Lori urging his every step, Will darted and grabbed the rock, then ran back to the window. He got ready to break the glass when—

Mark's head burst up into view.

They couldn't hear him through the thick window.

His eyes were pleading.

His mouth moved soundlessly.

While the two of them looked on, helpless, four deep bloody slashes hacked their way across Mark's face. Four parallel razor cuts, a synchronized slashing, cutting through Mark's wide open eyes, his cheeks, his lips, even tearing open the gums between his teeth.

Mark's face exploded in a plume of blood, then he collapsed.

Lori and Will looked on aghast as their friend sunk, broken, to the floor of his bedroom.

Behind Mark were the mirrored doors of his closet. Will could see these doors, and as Mark fell, Will saw the reflection of Mark's back. He saw the words that had been burned in reverse on Mark's skin.

Will read the backward Freddybrand in the reflective glass and saw the simple message the bastard had left there: "*FREDDY'S BACK!*"

***

A teenage kid's face. And another one. And another one—goddammit, such a pretty young thing.

Williams threw the photos down onto his desk. Scene-of-crime photos, every one of them. The kids were all killed out at Grover's Field last night. They were at an unlicensed public event, drinking booze, taking drugs and doing God-knows what else.

The Sheriff sighed.

His desk was covered with files and photographs—witness reports, statements, initial autopsy findings. This case was totally out of control.

It had started with the death of that boy on Elm Street—at that house. Then a friend of the boy had died, and then the friend's father. Then the Rollins and Davis boys had busted out of Westin. And now all this....

They were losing the battle.

There had been very few times during Williams's long career in law enforcement when this veteran had felt overwhelmed. Now was one of them. Brushing the photos aside, he sank his head into his hands. If he thought it would do any good, he'd have called in the Bureau.

Someone tapped at the glass window on his door. It was Deputy Stubbs, an odd expression on his face. The Sheriff made no reply, so Stubbs walked in anyway.

"Sheriff?" he said tentatively. "I've been compiling info based on eyewitness reports of the hockey mask killer? Now, I think we're dealing with—"

Williams raised a hand for silence. "We already know who did this."

Officer Goodman bustled in, pushing his way in front of Stubbs.

"Sheriff," said Goodman, "we closed down the school, set a curfew for anyone under eighteen."

What?

Stubbs didn't get it. What was wrong with this place? First Williams tried to cut Stubbs out of the loop, then he tried to pin the first three murders on that Blake kid, and now he says he knows who's responsible for all the killings? And there's a curfew? What the hell is going on?

Williams nodded his approval. "Good. Now I need twenty-four hour roadblocks set up. Nobody leaves town. and nobody gets in. We gotta contain this sonofabitch before he spreads any further."

Orders received, Goodman nodded and briskly left Stubbs and the Sheriff to whatever it was they were doing before he butted in.

Stubbs closed the office door. He couldn't hide an inch of the confusion he was feeling.

"Shouldn't we get the FBI to—"

Williams talked over him. "No outsiders, Stubbs. We can handle this. We've stopped him before."

"I'm lost here. Stopped *who* before?"

Williams paused. Picked up another of the black and white photos of the murdered kids.

"We don't say his name aloud," murmured the Sheriff. "You're not from around here, son. I don't expect you to understand."

Stubbs almost hit the roof. "With all due respect, Sheriff, I think we have a copycat of the old Jason Voorhees Crystal Lake killer on our hands."

Williams did not like the tone of Stubbs's voice. He let the photo fall, got up out of his chair, and put himself right into Stubbs's face.

"We do things around here a certain way for a reason, son. And that's given us four years of peace. So you either do what you're told with your mouth shut, or God help me I will lock you up, understand?"

Lock me up? Stubbs couldn't believe what he was hearing. This was crazy talk. But what could he do? He couldn't do anything here, but maybe...

Stubbs nodded.

Okay, Williams could have this round, but there's no way Stubbs was going to let any more kids get killed by this Voorhees wannabe. If he had to, Stubbs would go way outside the system. He didn't want to, it was against his nature, but he had no choice. He'd call in the Bureau—get these Springwood inbreds back into line—but only when he had enough evidence.

But from where Sheriff Williams was standing, Deputy Stubbs was beaten.

"Good," snapped the Sheriff. "Now get the hell out of here and find the Rollins boy."

This was an obvious diversion. Williams was sending Stubbs on a go fetch, to keep him out of the way.

Fine.

He'd go *fetch*.

TWELVE

Springwood was dead. The storefronts were abandoned, the streets empty, the sidewalks silent.

A police car slowly rolled by downtown. Sheriff Williams's curfew was in effect.

But this wasn't the first time Springwood had been a ghost town, and it sure as hell wouldn't be the last.

***

Lori and Will had spent the night hiding in Mark's… Bobby's van.

Will had been inconsolable. Mark had been his one true friend for so very long. He'd helped Will to keep it together through all their time at Westin. It was Mark who'd got them out of that place. Mark who knew everything about him. His best friend.

Another name to go on the list. They were dying. All of them. Falling like nine-pins, one by one by one.

As soon as the sun was up, Lori had used her cell phone to call Kia.

Every death had taught them something. Each murder had given them another clue, another confirmation.

They had seen Mark go up in smoke in front of their very eyes. They had seen four horrible gashes appear in Mark's face, as if someone invisible had taken hold of him and cut him up bad. Then they had seen the writing on Mark's back.

Freddy's back!

It was Freddy Krueger. Real. Freddy fucking Krueger.

So it was time to do something about it. Either fight back or wait to be killed. They'd done enough crying, enough running. The police, Lori's Dad—they were all no good. None of their parents factored into anything. Will and Lori were on their own.

But not entirely alone. There was Kia—and what about some of the others at the rave? They might not buy into the whole Krueger deal, but they'd have to be blind not to see that something was badly wrong. And that thing in the hockey mask? They all saw what

happened there. He was no ordinary man. Sure, he wasn't Krueger but he wasn't Soapy Joe either.

After Lori had made her initial call, it was Kia who had done the rest. She got busy on the phone, found who she could talk to, who wasn't interested, who wanted to do something about it.

And what it all boiled down to was this: a meeting in the damp stinking basement pad at Freeburg's parents.

***

Freeburg was rolling a joint, his twenty-seventh since the rave. He hadn't slept all night, and was still tweaking after having witnessed the Jason Voorhees Experience.

He sat at a beat-up round table—they all did, except for an endlessly yawning Lori who lay on a moth-eaten couch. There was another little table in the corner of the room, taken up by an ancient 433 megahertz piece-of-crap PC.

The place stank of weed and God-knows-what other shit Freeburg hid down here.

Lori took a look around her. This was it? The great war counsel?

Freeburg—stoned.

Will—poor Will—depressed, morose.

Kia—angry, irritable.

Linderman—totally freaked.

Okay, so come on, if I had to bet my whole life savings on the outcome of this fight, who would I pick: the Freddy Krueger/Jason Voorhees Tag Team, or the Freeburg Five?

***

It was Linderman who spoke first: "Why don't we all just leave town?"

Made sense, but Will shook his head. "Even if we leave, Freddy can still get to us. We all know about him, we're all afraid of him. It was our fear that gave him his power. We're marked now."

"Screw that clown!" whined Freeburg, sucking on his weed. "What kinda pussy comes after you in your dreams anyway? Now that dude

back at the cornfield? That's who we should be afraid of. Tell me who the fuck that was."

Freeburg had a point.

Only two people in the room had had some kind of trip involving this Krueger guy—so they could have imagined the whole thing—but all of them had seen the guy in the hockey mask. It must have been that fucked-up dude who'd killed Blake and Trey.

But who the fuck was he?

"His name is Jason Voorhees."

Who said that?

The voice came out of the darkness of the basement staircase.

Frightened, the kids all looked round to see Deputy Stubbs step forward and down into the light.

Without a second's thought, Freeburg flipped the joint into his mouth and swallowed it. Years of practice, my friend, years of practice.

After a few moments, joint gone, Freeburg spoke up. sounding just a little too defensive. "Shit, man, how'd you know we were here?"

Stubbs glanced across at Will. "No offence, but that mystery van out in the back wasn't exactly subtle."

Will groaned. The van was way too easy to spot. What a dork!

"Great," added Kia. "The cops. So now we're completely fucked."

Way it looked to her, they'd been busted wide open by the man. It was all over.

Stubbs raised his hands, palm open.

"No. I'm here to help," he explained.

He could tell they weren't convinced. An uneasy silence descended as Stubbs came right up to the table. He took them all in, each of them. They were tired, afraid, just kids. They shouldn't have to...

Stubbs had already made his decision when he left Sheriff Williams's office. There was no going back.

"This Jason Voorhees," he announced, looking at each of the kids in turn, "was supposedly drowned at Camp Crystal Lake in 1957 when he was eleven. The Counselors weren't watching him. Then they made the mistake of killing his mother. Legend has it Jason kept

returning from the grave to punish whoever returned to the camp. So I'd say we're dealing with a copycat here."

Linderman went along with everything except that last sentence.

"He's not a copycat," he said, still shaking from the memory of that moment of certain death. "I've seen what he can do. Up real close. He's the real Jason."

"That's not possible," Stubbs replied. "Jason is dead."

Freeburg was not impressed. "Well then you better start thinking outside the box, dude. Cause somebody's definitely bending the fucking reality rules!"

But Stubbs was certain. Back at the precinct, he'd taken the time to do some serious research. The official records were quite clear: some years ago, FBI Agent Elizabeth Marcus had lured Voorhees into an ambush. Voorhees resisted arrest, so a heavily-armed SWAT team took him out. According to Marcus's own report, the Voorhees termination had been "comprehensive" and in clear view of over thirty trained law enforcement officers.

The alleged copycat murders had started almost immediately afterwards, commencing with the killing of the coroner who carried out the official autopsy on Jason's remains. The copycat psycho then went on a killing spree from the Federal Morgue at Youngstown, Ohio, all the way back up to Crystal Lake—Jason's traditional stalking ground. There, the maniac attacked and killed some of Jason's last surviving relatives. The copycat was never caught, but it was rumored that he was killed in self defence by two of his would-be victims.

Stubbs was surprised that local police had not taken any efforts to confirm this, because—like the perpetrator here, now, at Springwood—the copycat killer had been extremely violent, and difficult to apprehend. He had killed at least four police officers at Crystal Lake. So you would have expected them to have made sure the killer was dead. If they had, this probably wouldn't be happening right now.

Stubbs was in no doubt that the Crystal Lake copycat and the Springwood copycat were one and the same guy: someone who fit the classic profile of an aggrieved relative of one of the victims of the real Jason Voorhees. This had happened once before, after all—a

paramedic named Roy Burns had gone berserk and copied Jason's MO back some time in the mid-1980s.

***

The group had reached an impasse. Was it Krueger or Voorhees?

Lori was depressed. The whole thing was going nowhere.

"Wait a minute..." Will started slowly; he was thinking it all through. "What if Freddy—"

Freeburg groaned as soon as he heard the "F" word.

Will ignored him. This was beginning to make some kind of sense. "What if Freddy," he continued, "brought Jason back. Maybe he was too weak to go after us on his own, so he used Jason. He knew we'd think it was him. That we'd spread the fear again. And now that it's working, it's like he can't shut Jason back down."

Lori yawned and rubbed her eyes. She caught herself dozing. She had to stay awake. She had seen with her own eyes what could happen if she fell asleep, like Mark. Any way, maybe Will had something.

She forced herself to join in. She had an idea.

"Freddy died by fire," she stated. "Jason by water. How can we use that?"

"I say we focus on Jason first," piped Linderman. Lori's contribution seemed to have inspired him to make the effort.

"But," Lori countered, "I thought we decided that Freddy's the one pulling the strings. Shouldn't we get him first?"

"Maybe you should try offering Freddy a sacrifice," suggested Stubbs.

Despite the grimness of the situation, Freeburg cracked a grin. "Totally! Like a virgin. Someone pure."

"Well don't look at me," warned Linderman, before they even thought of starting on him. "Even if you pay for it, it still counts."

The implication of Linderman's defense somehow slipped everyone by.

Even Kia, who usually never missed an opportunity to belittle Linderman, let this one past. She turned with a sly smile to look

across at Lori and said, "We all know who the virgin is here."

"Kia, what?" Lori was stunned.

"Oh come on," bitched Kia. "I know you never made it with Will. Why would he want to," she purred, and seductively draped an arm over Will's shoulder, "when he can fuck someone like me?"

Kia leaned forward and licked Will's ear sexily.

Lori expected him to push Kia away, but he loved it. Will just sat there and smiled as Kia licked his face. She was hot! And she was right!

Will stood up and looked down at Lori—Lori with her simpering, soulful, goody-two-shoes little face.

"Tie the bitch up," Will snarled.

Lori yelped. She fell back off the couch and half ran, half crawled for the door as the rest of the gang leapt after her.

Linderman had a roll of duct tape. Kia had some rope. Lori didn't know where they kept this stuff, and she didn't care. She—someone grabbed her arm—someone behind her.

Dr Campbell. Dad. "Don't worry, angel. You've still got me."

But his face was speckled with blood.

Dad, you're smiling, but there's blood on your face... and on your hands!

Campbell pulled his daughter close. "Come on, honey, give Daddy a kiss."

Gross!

Campbell slipped his daughter a length of deep wet tongue, right into her mouth, tonguing her lips, her cheeks, everywhere—and his right hand was clamped firmly over her crotch, his fingers probing, rotating...

Lori struggled to break free. She was able to whip her head away, disengaging herself from Daddy's incestuous saliva. But he held her fast. She was wrapped too tightly in the arms of Freddy Krueger.

Lori screamed. She tried to push him away, tried to claw at his burned, rotten face.

No use.

"Your lips say no," Freddy spat contemptuously, "but Freddy says *yes!*"

***

Lori awoke with a scream, making everyone in the basement start. They all spun and looked over at where she'd nodded off on the couch.

"Are you alright?" asked Will. "You fell asleep!"

He'd said that last phrase almost as an accusation. But Lori didn't reply. Her heart was hammering with abject fear. The dream had been so real. She'd managed to grab Freddy. She'd ripped at his face. Managed to tear...

Barely believing what she knew she was about to see, Lori opened her closed fist to reveal the object it held.

It contained one of Freddy's bloody ears.

Pulled off in the fight.

"Jesus!" screamed Lori, and she let the ear fall to the basement floor, where it immediately dissolved into a pile of cancerous maggots.

Lori jumped aside, making way for Stubbs who ran forward and stomped on the maggots with his regulation issue boots.

The dirty little bastards squelched under his feet.

Kia could have chucked there and then.

"I pulled it out of my dream!" said Lori, amazed and more than a little bit frightened.

"How is that possible?" asked Stubbs, grinding the last of the maggots into gloop.

It was Freeburg who replied. "Anything's possible now. Don't you get it?"

"Two killers," shuddered Kia. "We're not safe awake or asleep."

"It's not the sleep that's killing us," Lori insisted. "It's our *dreams*."

Something Lori just said. It clicked with Will. Reminded him of a comment Mark had made a couple of days ago. Then he remembered.

"At Westin," he said, thinking it all out, "Mark and I never dreamed!"

"Were you on any drugs?" asked Lori.

"Yeah. Something called, what was it? Hypnocil. They never told us what it was for, but everyone there was taking it."

Will looked at Lori, and she in turn looked at Linderman who knew immediately what to do. Linderman went across to the corner of the basement pad and booted up Freeburg's ancient PC. There were yellowing crusted stains on the keyboard.

The start-up and app load-time took forever, and Freeburg's ancient modem was so slow it could have been steam-powered, but eventually Linderman was online. Finally, Linderman was in his element.

The rest of the guys were grateful for the break. At least they could pause between revelations.

Kia was still seriously freaked out that Lori had actually been attacked here—right in front of them. It was just like Will had said; they weren't safe anywhere, not anywhere they could dream. That ear—it had been the proof.

"Gimme a second," said Linderman over his shoulder. "Just gimme a second... Got it. Hypnocil. Experimental drug. Not even approved by the FDA yet. Used for... the suppression of sleep-disturbance, specifically the dream state section of the sleep cycle."

Another piece of the puzzle had just fallen into place. All the kids at Westin were being doped with Hypnocil, to prevent them from dreaming. That was the only way the people of Springwood had been able to close the door on Freddy for these last four years.

"We need some of those pills," said Lori. "Enough for all of us." Then she looked at Will. "Can you get us back to Westin Hills?"

Will reached into his back pocket and pulled out the swipe card and keys Mark had stolen from Kinsey. He smiled grimly.

Meanwhile, over in the corner of the room, Linderman pulled up his favorite search engine, then typed in the name: **JASON VORHEES.**

THIRTEEN

Of all the places Will expected to have been heading for this early evening, Westin Hills was not it.

He rolled the van to a halt near Stubbs's patrol car at the rear of the massive psychiatric institution. Will stopped for a moment and looked up at the tall brick tower near the old abandoned West Wing. Something about that tower gave him the creeps. He never understood why they'd left that wing empty.

Stubbs nudged the teenager, breaking his reverie.

Will led the way to the same back door he and Mark had escaped through just two days earlier.

One card swipe later and the secure door was open.

They entered quietly, one after the other: Will, Stubbs, Lori, Kia, Linderman, Freeburg and...

Behind them, the shadow—the massive hulking shadow.

***

Security had been tightened since Will's escape. The staff at Westin could have reprogrammed the system to deactivate Kinsey's card entirely, but Dr Campbell's orders had been explicit. He wanted the system set up so that the card would still work, but that anyone using it would also trigger some kind of hidden alarm. That way, if Will Rollins tried to get back inside the building, they would know, and they would be able to go and restrain him.

And now, someone with the stolen card had just gained access to the building. The light flashed on the security console. Door number six.

In the dimness of the security room the guard saw the winking light immediately.

Easy decision.

He got up out of his seat, straightened his uniform, checked his gun was holstered, then went to investigate. He didn't want any

trouble, but if any of the crazy little bastards put up a struggle, he'd blow their ass straight to hell.

***

Stubbs, too, had his hand by his holster.

Will was leading them slowly up the darkened staircase.

At the top, they came to a T-junction in the corridor. They'd headed left and...

They'd only been in the place a couple of minutes, and already Will was the only one who didn't feel lost.

"This place is really huge," whispered Lori. "We'll never find the Hypnocil."

"Two groups, then," said Stubbs. "You guys," he nodded to Freeburg and Linderman, "come with me. We meet back here in twenty minutes. The rest of you: stay *together*."

Then Stubbs set off with his team close behind, leaving Will, Kia and Lori to head in the other direction.

Despite himself, Stubbs was letting the place get to him. Sure, it had been refurbished and looked modern on the inside, but the outside was eerie—and just the sheer size of the interior coupled with the omnipresent low lighting...

There was something about the very idea of insanity that scared the hell out of the policeman.

He pushed open a door on the right hand side of the corridor. Nothing but some kind of monitoring equipment.

He closed the door and rejoined the others.

Freeburg was rolling up yet another joint, like he really had a mind of his own. He lit up, then offered a hit to Linderman. Linderman was having none of it. He waved Freeburg away, casting a fearful glance in the direction of Stubbs.

Freeburg rolled his eyes. "What's he gonna do? Arrest me?"

Which kinda struck Linderman as missing the point.

***

Door number six.

It was shaking. Like someone was trying to get in.

The guard placed a hand on his gun—the holster was already open.

It was very dark.

Bang!

The door was shaking.

Bang!

The guard stepped forward.

Bang!

Was somebody hitting the door?

Bang! Bang!

Did he imagine seeing the door shake? It's impossible. We're talking a hundred and twenty pounds of reinforced steel here.

Bang!

The guard took another step. Should he open the door?

Okay... okay... just slow down... move forward... quietly... okay... gun ready... step forward... wait... listen... The guard put his ear to the door...

KABWHAMMM!

One hundred and twenty pounds of reinforced steel broke off its equally solid hinges and flew forward inside the doorway, crushing the guard instantly.

The guy lay there, dead beneath the door, his eyes open and blood trickling from his ears and mouth. A black heavy boot stepped forward onto the flattened door, crushing the air out of the guard's lungs.

***

"What was that?" jumped Linderman.

The sudden sound of the crashing door had echoed right along the corridor, causing Linderman and Stubbs to nearly have a twin cardiac arrest.

Stubbs looked back down the corridor.

"Where's Freeburg?" he asked.

Freeburg was nowhere to be seen.

Linderman cursed under his breath. Trust a fucking dope-head to screw everything up. Ten minutes and Freeburg probably couldn't remember why he was even there.

***

Lori hadn't heard the broken security door. She, Will and Kia were too engrossed by their current surroundings.

Will said he'd always thought this was a patient's room, but right now it looked kinda like a morgue. Both walls of the long chamber were lined with beds and slabs. And on each slab lay a body.

Lori looked closer and shuddered. The bodies had patches over their eyes—thick, black covers. She reached forward to touch a man's face. She hesitated, held back, fingers mere inches away, shaking.

"Are they... dead?" she asked.

Uuuuuhhhhhh.

The "dead" man sucked in a deep, long and unexpected breath, causing Lori to jump back startled, before the man lay quiet again. Still.

It was only now that Lori noticed that a number of tubes and wires were attached to each of the bodies. The connections ran to various monitors. She also saw that each patient had been given an intravenous drip, along with a number of other injected bag solutions. All the bodies were hooked up like this.

Will stepped over to her, and picked up a chart clipped to the foot of the man's bed. Quickly, he flipped through the pages. Most of the medical jargon and abbreviations made no sense at all, and a lot of the handwriting was illegible, but Will was able to read enough to reach a shattering conclusion.

"They're in a coma. It says... Shit! It says they were given too much Hypnocil."

Lori couldn't believe it. "Who would do this to people?"

Will handed her the chart, then quickly took a look at some of the other patient charts. They were all the same.

"Lori... your Dad's signature is at the bottom of all these charts."

Another piece of the puzzle. Another blow. Yet another terrible secret.

Lori shivered with overpowering emotion, then ran for the door. She didn't want to stay in this room a second longer. What was happening here... it was horrible. These people were all victims... drugged-up zombies... her father...

Kia and Will went after her.

***

If either Kia, Will or Lori had looked through the large rectangular window in the north wall of the patient room, they would have seen through into the adjacent monitoring room—where Freeburg was rolling up his latest joint.

He had been awake since the morning of the rave. He had taken hell knows how many drugs. He had been necking joints since the attack of the monster goalie. He was now completely and totally out of his freaking tree.

Shit in place, Freeburg licked the paper, sealed it, lit the mother, then had a long cool toke.

Oh yeah.

Like he needed all this bullshit. Life's too short to waste on hockey, man.

He sat down on the dusty floor and relaxed. He wasn't asleep. No way, José, he wasn't that stupid. If that Lori kid was right, sleep was totally non grata. He just wanted to rest his eyes, that's all.

Just wanted to...

His pupils were like pinholes.

And they stayed that way even when he turned his head left and saw the hideous, foot-long red and green caterpillar squirming its way across the open doorway. It was one ugly little bastard—squat, leathery, with something like black spikes for crawlers. And its face... sweet Holy Mother, it was like a demon thing, with those cruel slanting eyes and long fangs that sprouted upwards from its bottom jaw.

Freeburg frowned.

Come on, discrimination is *not* cool.

"Hey, little buddy," he ventured.

Then he stumbled forward and started to crawl on all fours toward the caterpillar. The creature seemed to smile as it reared up to meet the stoner. Freeburg was so out of it, he didn't notice that the caterpillar seemed to grow as it moved; but he did see the bulbous hookah which suddenly appeared out of thin air beside the caterpillar.

A broad smile chilled its way across Freeburg's face. The hookah was bubbling and he could smell the herbal from here.

The caterpillar smiled again, then writhed its way into position to take a deep puff from the hookah. Then it blew its mouthful of delirious fumes into Freeburg's gawking face.

Freeburg breathed in deep. And the verdict: "Coolio."

Freeburg's head was spinning. He wanted a go for himself, but when he went to crawl forward up to the hookah, the glass tube vanished. All the same, the little aster Freeburg just had was the ultimate high. Maybe it needed to blend with the caterpillar's own juices before it was just right, you know, like those worms they stick in tequila.

Maybe this fat worm was totally happening.

Freeburg wanted to show his appreciation to his new friend, but the caterpillar was inching away in the direcion of the closed connecting door to the patient room.

Whoa! Check it out!

As the caterpillar crawled nearer to the patient room door, the door shrank—no really... check it out—until soon the door was so small that the caterpillar had to squeeze to pass through it.

Awesome—like it was some kinda Alice in Freddyland vibe, or some weird shit—hey, come back little friend—gimme more of that puff...

Earth was not calling Freeburg.

He dragged himself drunkenly forward in the direction of the shrunken door. It never once occurred to him that he had no chance of squeezing his big fat ass through a two-foot high door frame.

***

Freeburg pushed open the door and crawled into the patient room.

The caterpillar was gone, so he stood up.

Something didn't make sense.

Hadn't he just...

Whatever.

And now it was his turn to be freaked out by the bodies arranged on the two rows of slabs running down the length of the room.

He didn't know they were only comatose. He thought they were all dead. Either way, they shouldn't all just, like, sit up at once like that—should they?

Wired to a plethora of cables and tubes, the bodies sat bolt upright in perfect uniformity. Then slowly, simultaneously, they all turned to stare at Freeburg.

Okay, this was getting a bit much. Why were they all staring at him?

"What do you want?" asked Freeburg.

The dark ward was suddenly alive with the echoing sibilants of whispering. Voices, lots of voices, all hissing in the darkness. Yet Freeburg was somehow able to hear what they were saying. He could distinguish words from the morass of insistent comatose demands.

"I... I don't know where the Hypnocil is," he said.

Again, the coma victims responded with one mind.

Simultaneously they turned and pointed to the same spot on the far wall. The patient closest to Freeburg whispered in the stoner's ear. Even as far gone as he was, Freeburg couldn't help but notice that the patches over this guy's eyes were bloody—and his lips were blue.

Dead people talking. Not good. Not good at all.

But, you know, what would it hurt to do these guys just one little favor? They all seemed to know where the Hypnocil was. The stiff who just whispered in his ear, said the drugs were in a box hidden under the lab sink.

What sink?

Freeburg looked around. All his new buddies still had their arms raised. They were still pointing over to the far wall... to a... Oh right, that sink. Cool.

What the fuck were drugs doing in a sink?

Freeburg walked over to the metallic basin. Not there. Oh, yeah—cupboards beneath. Open the door... look inside...

Result!

A plain cardboard box.

Freeburg pulled the box out of its hiding place and opened the unsealed flaps. The box was filled with small bottles of pills, dozens of them. Freeburg took out one of the bottles and stared intently at the label.

Come on, eyes. Do your thing. Focus for the man!

The label read: Hypnocil.

Hypnocil...

Something about Hypnocil...

No, don't tell me, I know this one.

He remembered.

Freeburg turned round and shook the bottle at the rows of sitting comatose bodies. Though they all wore bloodied patches over their eyes, Freeburg knew these dead dudes could see him just fine.

"I can't pour these down the drain," Freeburg protested. "We need this stuff."

Finally the nickel dropped. Freeburg remembered why they'd come to this crazy nightmare place. They'd come here for this Hypnocil shit. But even if they hadn't, it was totally against Freeburg's nature to waste good drugs. For all he knew, Hypnocil could rock! If it could stop dreams, who knows what else it could do; LSD had been experimental once, Ecstasy too. And even if vanilla Hypnocil was a drag, it might well kick ass in the right cocktail.

Oh man, he knew these dead guys all wanted the pills gone, but he couldn't do it. He had a whole box in his hand. All fresh goods. Worst case scenario: they had to be worth a few bucks on the open market.

Will and Lori had been right about this nightmare shit—Freeburg was having a total mare. No amount of resin was going to help him solve this dilemma.

Drip-drip!

What the f—

Two drops of a clear viscous fluid had landed on Freeburg's forehead.

Where?

He looked up, his mouth hanging wide open, his eyes almost totally glassy with heavy kick-ass substance abuse.

It was the caterpillar. It had been in the room all the time, and somehow it had crawled up onto the ceiling of the patient room, from where it had stalked the stoner with pinpoint accuracy.

As for the dripping fluid... it was insect drool. A disgusting trail of saliva, hanging from the caterpillar's grimacing mouth.

Oh so gross!

It was all fucking gross. The dead bodies. The whispering. The saliva. Everything. Way too fucking—

The caterpillar dropped and landed on Freeburg's face.

Freeburg cried out in surprise and let the pills fall to the floor. Then quickly, he seized the fat, warm, squirming leathery body of the Freddypillar in both hands and tried to pull it away.

The nightmare creature had other ideas. Freeburg could feel the oversized maggot's spastic pulse on his lips as it slowly forced its way into his mouth and began to slither down into his throat.

He couldn't breathe.

The caterpillar burrowed deeper.

He couldn't fucking breathe.

He tried to pull it out, but the creature was too far deep inside him.

Freeburg convulsed, fell to the ground, howled in pain.

The thing, the caterpillar was inside his stomach, inside his fucking soul.

Over the years Freeburg had sniffed, swallowed or injected practically every substance known to man, but in all that time, he'd never felt his mind slip away quite as it did now. The caterpillar was releasing something inside him, some narcotic, some psychedelic, some...

Freeburg was growing faint. His thoughts became light. The pain and revulsion were history. He was flying, flying away...

Suddenly the coughing and heaving stopped, and Free burg grew quiet. Then slowly, he stood up. But there was something different about him. He didn't sway and drift along as normal. When he moved now, he bent forward and splayed his limbs like a rag doll.

The body was Freeburg's but the will was Freddy Krueger's!

Freddy commanded Freeburg to lurch forward and awkwardly pick up the spilled bottles of Hypnocil. What remained of Freeburg cried out in protest, but the cries came from deep inside Freeburg's body, and were muffled and faint. Freeburg's mouth was under Freddy's control.

"Relax, kid," rasped Freeburg's lips. "Freddy's drivin' now."

And Freddy wasted no time in picking up the Hypnocil, opening the bottles and tipping all of the vital pills down the sink.

***

"Hey!"

From inside the adjacent monitoring room, Deputy Stubbs could see Freeburg through the large observation window. Freeburg was pouring the pills down the drain.

Linderman stood right behind the police officer but he couldn't take his eyes off all the bodies in the patient. room—just lying there on slabs, like corpses.

Both of them were looking straight through the window into the patient room. None of them paid any attention to the reflection in the observation window—the reflection of Stubbs, Linderman and someone who had just quietly entered the monitoring room behind them.

"What the hell is he..." Stubbs had to go in there and stop the stupid idiot.

He stepped back and knocked into Linderman, who was standing too close. Linderman moved to get out of the deputy's way. He turned—and saw the huge machete swinging down hard toward his face.

It was Jason Voorhees!

Linderman gasped, unable to move, but was saved at the last instant by Stubbs who, with lightning reactions, pulled the boy out of the way of the killer edge.

KCH-BZZBZZBZZZ!!!

Sparks flew as Jason's deadly weapon slammed into a fully operational monitoring console, the electricity flooding through the metal blade and coursing through Jason's quivering electrocuted body.

Linderman almost shit his pants.

It was Voorhees! Again!

On both of the last two days of Linderman's young life, he had seen Jason's machete cutting down through the air towards his face. On both occasions, Linderman had survived without even a scratch.

Stubbs pushed the bewildered kid towards the door, then took out his revolver.

"Get out of here!" he barked. "Go!"

Jason was twitching, but it looked as if he was going to pull his machete free and break the connection.

Stubbs fired at him—once, twice—at point blank range.

This copycat bastard would...

Jason lashed out with his hand and gripped Stubbs by the neck.

BZZBZZBZZZ!!

The killer voltage traveled up from the console, through the machete blade into Jason Voorhees, then through Jason's hand into Deputy Stubbs.

Stubbs's muscles seized up immediately, and both officer and maniac shook with the power of the electricity, both men frying inside a shower of sparks.

BZZBZZBZZZ!!!

The deputy dropped his gun; though his grip had tightened, the spastic jerking of his limbs, shook the revolver free, letting it fall to the ground.

***

Lori, Kia and Will had found yet another staircase. Will was sure he knew where the stairs led to. The trio were in the process of discussing this when Lori raised a hand for silence, a troubled look on her face.

"Wait up," she said, voice trembling. "You hear that?"

Kia and Will did what she asked. They listened.

It was distant. It was echoing. But it was clear. They could hear the sound of screaming.

***

Linderman was wild with terror. He stood transfixed in the open doorway, screaming and screaming. Stubbs had told him to run away, but he couldn't. He had to watch. He wanted to see the deputy blow Jason away—and he did. Only it didn't work.

Electricity. Gun shots. Voorhees just took it all—and he was still standing!

It was Stubbs who was turning all black and charred. Stubbs whose hair had blackened, and whose eyes and mouth had dried up and shriveled.

Jason just stood there, conducting the electricity, killing the deputy. All mighty. All powerful. Invulnerable. Jason!

KWHOOOMM!

The monitoring console overloaded with one final explosion of sparks, the air now thick with the smell of charred flesh and electrical burning. Almost immediately, what few lights were on in the clinic now cut out. The destruction of the control panel had tripped most of the main fuses in the building, causing a few scant red emergency backup lights to activate. Every corridor and every room in Westin Hills Psychiatric Institution was now the color of blood.

Stubbs hit the ground, his skin completely chargrilled.

Jason's machete too was red hot—it glowed in the dim light of the cramped room—but Jason didn't seem to notice the heat as he withdrew the weapon from the console. Nor did he seem in any way affected by the electricity or the gunshot wounds. Stubbs was a

blackened slab of meat, while Jason merely displayed some minor singeing at the edges of his already torn and ragged clothing.

Now Jason turned his attention towards the terrified Linderman.

The terrified young man scooped up Stubbs's gun and ran screaming for his life.

FOURTEEN

Freeburg had sunk all the Hypnocil and was now searching through a drug cabinet in the patient room.

He had seen or heard nothing of Stubbs's fight with Jason in the adjoining room. That's because Freeburg was fast asleep, giving Freddy the power to channel himself through Freeburg's dreaming mind, into Freeburg's sleeping body.

And about fucking time!

Freddy had thought he'd had everything worked out. It had all seemed so easy.

Get Jason. Send him to Springwood. Get him to kill some brats. Make the kids afraid. Give the kids nightmares that would open their minds to Freddy. Grow strong from the kids' fear. Then kill the little bastards in their nightmares and feed off their fucked-up little souls. All Freddy had needed was enough fear until he became powerful enough to carry on business as usual.

Sure, the townspeople thought they'd been so clever. Get the last remaining kids who were open to Freddy—kids who were still having nightmares—and give them Hypnocil. Round up the little fools, imprison them in this asylum, then kill their dreams with drugs.

They'd shut the door on Freddy. If the kids stopped having nightmares, he couldn't get at them. Then they couldn't spread their fear to other kids, so that they'd have nightmares, and so on, and so on. The people of Springwood had quarantined Freddy.

Which is why he brought Jason back—to open the door, to break free of the interdiction.

All Freddy needed was someone to start killing the kids of Elm Street again, then everything else would follow. Once kids started dying in their sleep, they'd start digging up the past. And they'd find out about Freddy Krueger. Who else could it be? Surely there couldn't be two invincible maniacs stalking Springwood with almost supernatural evil?

It had to be Freddy.

It had to be.

Eh-uh! Wrong!

It was Jason, fucking Jason—only the stupid fucking retard didn't know when to stop.

Jason should have called it a day the moment Freddy grew strong again, but no. That moron Voorhees wouldn't stop killing. He killed that Gibb bitch when she was exactly where Freddy wanted her. She would have been the first. She would have been Freddy's homecoming—the first one to perish in her dreams and die in real life. But Voorhees went and fucking offed her! Now he was trying to kill all of them. He was taking them away from Freddy—he was taking their souls away from him. He was unwittingly pushing Krueger back into the darkness.

Freddy had thought he could control Jason but he knew now to his cost that he couldn't. He'd fooled Jason into going to Elm Street, but then everything had spun out of Freddy's razored hands. Jason had begun a killing spree and, like so many other people before him, Freddy had realized too late that Jason Voorhees was unstoppable.

The only way Freddy could get to Jason now would be in Jason's dreams. If Freddy somehow materialized in the real world—say, if Freddy attacked Jason now with Free burg's body—Freddy would be finished in seconds. Jason was way too powerful in the real world, which is why Freddy didn't give a hot flying fuck who was being fried in the monitoring room.

Freddy was master of the dream world. But his plan for Jason Vorhees had foundered. If he could dispose of the killer, he could then return to the far more pleasurable task of killing more kids and sucking strength from their souls. Trouble was, right now he could get to Voorhees only in his sleep—but the maniac never slept.

***

Freddy could feel this one they called Freeburg fighting to regain control of his body. Perversely, what had made Free burg so easy to possess, now made Freeburg difficult to control. The teenager's brain had been scrambled by years of drug abuse, making it hard for Freddy to retain much command of any of Freeburg's basic motor

functions. The guy's brain wasn't like any other brain Freddy had entered. Controlling Freeburg was like trying to hold onto each and every strand of a bowl of moist spaghetti.

Freddy felt Freeburg's right arm begin to shake—independence!—but a wave of red and green bands rippled down from Freeburg's shoulder to his hand, and Freddy was in control again. But for how long?

Freeburg opened another drawer in the cabinet, and found what Freddy was looking for: tranquilizers.

Freddy/Freeburg began to sing a quiet lullaby. Then he picked up a bottle of thin pink liquid. A label on the bottle read: "Concentrate: dilute 1000/1."

Dilute, my ass!

Freddy grabbed hold of the two biggest syringes he could find, then filled them with the pure tranquilizer concentrate. Proud of his handiwork, Freddy held the syringes aloft, one in each hand.

One, two, Freddy's comin' for you...

***

The other teenagers were out of breath when they reached the patient room. They'd followed the sound of Linderman's screams and run as fast as they could. They were pretty sure that the screams came from somewhere round here.

Kia waited in the hallway, while Lori and Will re-entered the ghoulish psychiatric ward with its rows of sleeping bodies.

Freeburg was nowhere to be seen, but something had changed since Will and Lori were last here... There was a pile of empty pill bottles lying scattered around the lab sink.

Will hurried over and picked up a couple of the bottles. Hypnocil.

"Shit! They're all empty," he snarled.

But Lori didn't respond to this setback.

Will turned to look at her. She stood still, dumbstruck, gazing off somewhere to the side. Will followed her stare. She was looking at the window leading to the adjacent monitoring room.

Will jumped. He could see a body, a smoldering body. But who?

Almost as if she were in a trance, Lori walked across the room and took a closer look through the window.

Will waited in silence.

The bodies lay quite still on their slabs.

Closer, in the red glow of the emergency lighting, Lori stepped towards the—

Stubbs's charred body came hurtling through the glass with an enormous crash, sending shards and splinters of the large window pane in all directions.

Lori screamed and ran back in horror.

Stubbs's body had been hurled clear through the window, and had landed on the patient room floor in a Springwood Fried Heap.

Stubbs had been thrown.

Will looked up, and there standing right up against the shattered window frame was Jason Voorhees.

Lori and will ran for their lives. They bolted out through the patient room door and rushed straight past Kia, who knew better than to waste time asking dumb questions. She'd heard the glass break, she'd heard Lori scream, so she shut her mouth and ran too—

Straight into Linderman.

All four of them cried out at this abrupt and unexpected meeting at the junction of four hallways.

Linderman still had Stubbs's revolver, but he was holding it awkwardly and Will had to wonder who posed more of a threat to him: Jason Voorhees, or Linderman with a loaded gun.

"Deputy Stubbs..." Linderman was hyperventilating, "He—"

"We know, we know!" bustled Will. "Let's go!"

But Lori held back a moment.

"Where's Freeburg?" she asked plaintively, but Linder man just shook his head, and continued gasping for air like a fish out of water.

They were standing at a crossroad of corridors. Will pretty much knew which way to go. If only the proper fucking lights were on; this red crap was giving him a headache.

Right.

Time to move.

Will led the others round the corner into one of the four corridors—where they saw Jason ahead of them.

Jason was clambering out of the monitoring room. There were faint wisps of smoke coming from his massive form and his machete still glowed with the heat from the electric console.

The hockey mask flicked sideways.

They could see his eyes… which meant that he had seen them.

Real good choice, Will.

They ran back to the crossroad and turned down another hallway—where they met Freeburg.

Freeburg?

He looked seriously strange. He was just standing there in the middle of hall, his hands hidden behind his back. And his eyes looked more glazed than normal—if that was possible…

"F-Freeburg?" asked Lori, looking for some sign of normality in the guy.

Footsteps. Behind them… Jason Voorhees!

The machete-wielding maniac had followed them, so now they were piggies in the middle, with Freeburg on one side and Jason on the other.

A no-brainer. They ran up to Freeburg. He might be on a drug trip of Olympic gold medal proportions, but at least he was on their side.

Jason came after them—striding, resolute, machete in hand.

When the kids reached Freeburg, they carried on running. But Freeburg didn't budge. He just stood there, watching the approaching leviathan of gore that was Jason Voorhees.

"Freeburg!" shouted Kia—what the fuck was he doing? "C'mon! He'll kill you!"

He ignored her. He just waited for Jason… and smiled.

Further down the corridor now, the gang stopped and called back, begging Freeburg to come with them, screaming for him to run.

It wasn't like Freeburg to give himself up in a noble act of sacrifice. Besides, there was no need for anyone to sacrifice themselves. They weren't cornered. They didn't need someone to buy time for them. All they had to do was run for their fucking lives.

"The hell is he doing?" barked Will.

He didn't understand. None of them did.

Jason had reached Freeburg now...

Run!

He raised the red hot machete, ready to hack Freeburg straight across the chest...

Ruuuun!

Freeburg revealed the two giant syringes from behind his back, dived forward and buried the needles deep into Jason's neck.

"COME TO FREDDY!!!" gloated Krueger as he pushed the plungers, slamming the pure, undiluted tranquilizer into Jason's knotted veins.

But no drug works that instantly.

Jason blindly lashed out with the machete, using all his might. He felt the blade connect with human flesh—a feeling he knew well—but wasn't sure where the blow had landed.

"Freeburg!" Lori cried.

In the dull red glow of the emergency lighting it was difficult to see just what had happened. Jason and Freeburg seemed to be on "pause." They just stood there, facing each other. But the machete... Jason couldn't have missed...

As the four friends looked on, the top half of Freeburg's body toppled forward, separated itself from the bottom half of the body, then fell to the ground with the heavy, sodden sound of tenderized offal. Jason had hacked Free burg in two, clean through the waist.

For a moment, Freeburg's legs just stood there, braced, glistening red in a clear flat, anatomical mid-section slicing of organs, muscle and bone. Then they, too, collapsed onto the ground, knocking Freeburg's trunk aside.

Jason stood over Freeburg's halves. Towering. Motionless. Triumphant.

Lori couldn't help but watch. Somewhere at the back of her devastated mind she knew she should run, but there was something utterly magnetic about this bizarre tableau, the sudden stillness.

What she didn't know was that Jason was quietly reeling under the attack of the tranquilizer. The impossibly powerful sedative was

coursing through his veins, subduing him, numbing him. He tried to fight it, tried to resist...

Jason fell backwards, his body straight, his back slamming into the ground. He just lay there, the remains of Freeburg lying by his vast feet.

Silence.

It was Linderman who broke the magic of the moment.

"Fuck ME!"

FIFTEEN

Jason didn't sleep.

He *never* slept.

When they hacked him to death with his own machete, he was awake.

When they chained him to the bottom of a lake, he was awake.

When they put him in a grave at Eternal Peace Cemetery, he was awake.

Even when they dropped the torn pieces of his body in a drip tray in the Federal Morgue at Youngstown, Jason was awake.

And even when Jason had been dragged down to Hell, he'd been awake.

***

His eyes flicked open inside the holes of the hockey mask.

He had been asleep.

Where was he?

Jason sat upright, his arms hanging by his sides as he raised his back into the vertical position.

Where was he?

He stood up.

Pipes. Steam. Valves. Ducts. Catwalks. Hollow metal stairs. Furnace.

A boiler room.

"I'm very disappointed in you, Jason."

Who was that? A woman's voice. Familiar.

Jason looked but could see no one.

"You disobeyed me." That voice again. "You were supposed to come back home. Just kill a few of them."

There!

A figure stepped out of the shadows on the iron walkway in front of him.

He knew her.

She looked upset.

It was Mommy. Pamela Voorhees.

She had brought him back. She had raised him from the grave. But he had not disobeyed her. He had done as she'd commanded. He'd found the teenagers and made them pay. They'd paid for the death of his Mommy. They'd paid for letting him drown in the lake. They'd paid...

But now... this place...

Had his mother rescued him? How else did he get here?

Pamela Voorhees walked slowly forwards. Now she sounded angry with her boy.

"But I blame myself. I should have known you wouldn't be able to stop killing. You're like a big stupid dog that can't stop eating... even when your Master's said you've had enough."

She came closer.

Something was wrong. Jason raised his machete uncertainly.

"But now," Pamela's voice grew deeper, hoarse, more guttural, "it's time to put this doggie to sleep... *for good!*"

Suddenly Pamela's face contorted into rage, and she screeched and charged forward, raising her right hand into a claw as if she planned to scratch Jason's face.

What was happening? Mommy?

Jason was confused, and made no attempt to move—not even when Pamela Voorhees started to change into Freddy Krueger right in front of Jason's sunken eyes.

The clawed hand sprouted Krueger blades, and Freddy reached out and dragged the five razors along the metal rail on the side of the catwalk.

Scrreeeechhhh!

Sharp metal blades met with rusted piping, sending jagged golden sparks shooting out from the deadly fingertips.

Now Jason understood.

He saw Freddy Krueger.

He had been used.

Krueger had fooled him, had tricked him, had got inside his mind.

Krueger had fooled him.

Like they all did.

They all tried to fool Jason.

Jason Voorhees tightened his grip on the machete, his arm shaking with barely restrained rage.

***

Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger, both born in 1946. Two harbingers of hate, sent hurtling down two different highways to Hell, never once suspecting that their separate bloody routes were both headed for this same place.

This conflict was something that had to be.

It was inevitable.

It was the moment the Seven Layers of Hell had long been waiting for. Freddy, running crazily towards Jason with his razor claw of nightmarish doom. Jason, standing waiting for Freddy, transmitting his undying rage through the long steady blade of the devastating machete.

This was the ultimate fusion of Evil, from which there could be only one victor. Only one of them would survive this test of ungodly mutilation. The other would be consigned to an eternity of vile torment.

This is it...

Arms flailing, Freddy hurled himself forward through the air, almost as if springing off a trampoline. The raggedy man howled with laughter as he raised his arms and legs. ready to pounce on Jason.

But Jason was ready.

He lashed out with his machete, and hacked Freddy's clawed arm clean off at the elbow.

Freddy's severed half-limb went tumbling over the edge of the catwalk and fell down into the depths of the boiler room below, the metal claws of his glove clattering distantly against the maze of iron pipes and boilers.

"Aargh! My fucking arm!" cried Krueger.

Way below, his severed hand hit the ground. The claw fingers were still writhing, the razors slashing and twitching like the death throes of a cutthroat spider.

Freddy fell back against the pipes, staring at his butchered arm in disbelief.

THWAACK!

Jason struck again, his blow striking with deadly accuracy.

"Aagh!" Freddy's other arm fell away too, only this one had been hacked off at the shoulder.

Freddy dropped to his knees screaming like a banshee, a double amputee with blood flowing into the sleeves of his already red and green sweater.

Jason looked down as this Venus de Krueger knelt helpless and armless before him. But Jason had a lot to learn.

Freddy was no stranger to dismemberment. In past nightmares he'd cut off his own fingers. Once he'd even torn off his own gloved arm and worn it as a seat-belt! He'd do anything to terrify his victims.

Oh yes, that dumb fuck Jason had a lot to learn.

This was the nightmare realm, and Freddy was its ruler.

Krueger smiled back up at Jason while two new arms quickly materialized out from the bloody sockets where Jason had done his damage. Freddy laughed and flexed his razor fingers. He clenched his other hand in a fist and shook it up and down at Jason, the big jerk-off.

Unfazed or uncomprehending, Jason gripped the machete with both hands and swung it high over Freddy's head, ready to bring it slamming down on his kneeling victim.

SHHWWI-GNN.

Freddy caught the descending blades between the closed palms of his hands, stopping the blow in mid-flight.

This was impossible.

They wrestled for control of the machete, Jason standing, Freddy kneeling.

Jason tried to use brute force, but Freddy was too clever for him. Krueger twisted his gloved hand, catching the machete between two

of his razor blades, flipping the machete up and away.

The blade spun and twirled, edge over grip, flying through the hot, humid air, before slamming point-first into a steam pipe. Hot vapor hissed out through the puncture.

Jason had no weapon, save for his brute str—

Freddy slammed an elbow hard into Jason's face with a sound like a sledgehammer breaking a paving slab. Followed by another. And another.

Jason fell back, step by step, his masked face slapped from side to side, until finally Freddy pulled back for the final punch to send Jason flying backwards through the air, and crashing into a nest of piping.

The meeting of Voorhees and labyrinthine plumbing resounded like the tolling of a death bell throughout the entire cavernous boiler room.

Freddy looked down at the fallen figure.

"Welcome to my nightmare," he sneered. Jason was on Krueger's territory now.

The brute staggered slowly, silently to his feet.

Oh, back for more?

Freddy cackled, then raised his deadly glove.

A flick of a finger blade...

Jason was lifted off his feet by an invisible force, and sent slamming into a wheel-shaped valve that protruded from the largest pipe behind him.

Such pain!

Jason tried again.

Freddy waved his glove once more.

More pain!

And again, and again, Jason painfully stepped away from the wheel-valve only to be sent hurtling over and over. Krueger was toying with him; Jason was Freddy's puppet.

Dance for me, bitch!

Voorhees was thrown back into the valve one last time before slumping to the metal floor. The valve, the pipe—the whole system

had been dented and crushed by the repeated impact of Jason's powerful body.

But it wasn't over yet. A sly grin crossed Freddy Krueger's face. He looked over to Jason's machete where it was still lodged in the hissing steam-pipe.

Freddy closed his eyes. Concentrated. Voorhees was going nowhere. The machete began to vibrate, trying to obey Krueger's mental command. Suddenly it was free! The blade sliced through the air, flying forward at incredible speed, straight towards Jason.

Freddy was going to kill Voorhees with his own weapon. Unaware of the impending blow, Jason slowly climbed to his feet, and looked up...

The eyes in the hockey mask went wide with realization. The machete wasn't more than a foot away.

Jason reached out and grabbed it.

He snatched the machete, caught it at the instant it was about to enter his chest. Only, he wasn't holding the grip; he was holding the blade.

Freddy laughed as the machete wriggled and shook in Jason's hand.

The blade cut through Jason's black leather gloves, and dug through Jason's rotted fingers to the bone. All the while the machete was fighting to edge ever closer to Jason's chest.

Time to bring this charade to an end!

While Jason struggled with the lethal machete, Freddy looked around until he spied a steel plate lying nearby. He motioned with his knife-edge glove, and the plate responded by taking off. It flew up and whirled through the air towards Jason.

KTANGG!

The plate struck the handle of the machete, hammering the weapon.

Jason lost his grip. The machete blade cut deep into the deathless maniac's chest. It went straight through him, and came out through the middle of his back, where it then pierced one of the pipes behind him. Jason was stuck, pinned to the pipe by his own machete. He had killed so many people this very same way—impaling victims with his

machete, pinning them to trees, doors, window frames. Now he knew how it felt.

Jason Voorhees struggled to break free, but the machete held him fast, scraping and slicing his innards with each move he made.

Freddy gloated in victory. He strode casually over to Jason, raised his glove, then tapped Jason's hockey mask with one of his finger knives.

"Penny for your thoughts, chief?" he laughed.

Jason suddenly twisted.

He withdrew the machete with his left hand and turned the edge of the blade upwards. At the same time, he grabbed Freddy's head with his right hand, and forced Freddy's neck down towards the blade.

Jason had waited for this. He had waited for his attacker to get too close.

Jason would decapitate Freddy.

Krueger's snap-brimmed hat fell to the floor, and he snarled as his charred neck...

Vanished.

***

Jason whirled about.

Where had he gone?

Jason had held him. He was going to kill him.

Confused, the machete-wielding behemoth looked all around him. But it was dark, and there were too many pipes, too many shadows, too many hiding places.

Jason was lifted off his feet by an unseen force.

NOT AGAIN!

Freddy stood high on a balcony. He looked down on Jason hanging in space like a kid's toy.

Krueger's head was bare, but he could remedy that. Freddy held his gloved hand up, keeping Jason sus pended—but he extended his bare hand and pointed to the ground. His fedora shot up out of nowhere and slipped comfortably into his open hand. Freddy then flipped the hat with the fingers of his left hand, bounced it on his left

elbow, then smiled as the hat flew up and landed neatly and perfectly on his head.

He laughed with pleasure.

Back to business.

Freddy fixed Jason with his insipid, watery-gray eyes. His eyes narrowed. A sick smile spread over his lips.

He moved his gloved hand this way and that, weaving the five razors in pretty patterns through the air. And in turn Jason moved this way and that, crashing four limbs with bone-shattering force through anything that stood in his way.

Freddy moved his hand this way... Jason smashed his head against a pipe.

Freddy move his hand that way... Jason's back slammed into a scalding boiler.

Krueger laughed and scuttled quickly down an open metal stairwell. He wanted to get closer to the action.

Now he was waving his hand frantically, and Jason was being slung every which way around the boiler room, spinning, crashing, rebounding like a ball on a pinball table. Jason could do nothing as his nemesis threw him into one pipe after another.

Freddy could see the life being slowly pummeled out of this pathetic dumb mommy's boy. Didn't Voorhees know that mothers were only good for screwing and killing?

Jason's head hung limp as Freddy brought his body near, so that he could kick Voorhees and slice at him with his claw hand.

Jason was seriously cut up.

His neck was broken.

He'd been burnt.

He was beaten.

Krueger then used all his power to lift Jason high into the air. For a moment Jason simply dangled, suspended in space, then Krueger snipped his glove aside, breaking the link and letting Jason fall.

BWHOOOOM!

Jason hit the floor with gut-splattering impact.

But Freddy wasn't done yet. He knew what Voorhees was capable of. He knew that he had to kill Jason off once and for all.

Now... now that Jason lay broken, Freddy got ready to administer the final blow of execution.

Freddy tensed his body and braced himself in a Herculean effort of willpower. His whole body shook as he concentrated, summoned all his power, all his control in this nightmare domain.

Above, high above Jason's prone body, hung a boiler—suspended by pipes and other rigging. But this wasn't just any boiler. It was massive, it was thick with jagged layers of rust, it spewed toxic fumes, its surface was surely as hot as the Earth's molten core, it weighed over ten tons... This was the mother of all boilers!

The whole boiler room started to shake, the pipes rattled, a subsonic rumble of power vibrated the entire floor.

GRRRANKK!

One of the pipes connected to the megaboiler broke free.

GINKK!

And another.

GRRAKK!

And another.

Soon, the entirety of the huge tank had broken free of its connections—ripped from the heart of the boiler room by the might of Freddy's infernal willpower. The whole room was shaking now, as if in expectation of what was to come.

Freddy looked up, saw the boiler suspended over Jason's beaten body. Like some demented conductor, he raised his arms, then flung both hands downwards.

Almost immediately, the great boiler tank obeyed Freddy's gesture and dropped through the air, before hitting the ground and exploding with colossal, grinding, demolishing force on Jason's helpless body.

The boiler room reverberated with the deafening boom of iron on concrete—gasses and fire escaped out of the crashed boiler. Freddy had turned this place into heavy metal Hell.

***

It was over. Finished. There'd be no more plans ruined by this retard.

Freddy leapt down to the wipeout zone, and proudly surveyed the crushed mess that was Jason Voorhees. The dead maniac was almost hard to see beneath the blazing, broken mass of the fallen boiler.

There...

Freddy could see Jason's hand jutting out from beneath the wreckage. Jason's hand... twitching.

What did he have to do? Krueger roared with anger: "Why won't you die?"

The next thing Krueger knew, Jason's twitching hand had reached out and clamped tight round Freddy's ankle.

Freddy tried to break free—kicking, struggling—as Jason heaved the massive boiler up and away.

Impossible!

Just as Jason had underestimated Freddy's power in the dream world, Freddy had underestimated Jason's indomitable willpower in any world.

Freddy also forgot what he himself, masquerading as Pamela Voorhees, had told this psychopath: "Jason. My special, special boy. Do you know what your gift is? No matter what they do to you... you cannot die. You can NEVER die."

This was true in the real world, and it sure as hell was true in this namby-pamby fucking dreamworld!

Jason stood upright, still holding onto Freddy's ankle, and then, with a massive effort, he swung Freddy up into the air and threw the dream demon across the room and into a twist of harsh metal piping.

The pipes split open immediately, releasing a flood of teeming water onto the concrete floor of the boiler room. The liquid coolant fell like a waterfall in front of Freddy and began to spread forward across the room, gushing in torrents from the pipes and flooding over towards Jason's feet.

Jason recoiled.

Freddy caught the scent of his emotion in an instant.

Fear! In the eyes. Inside the hockey mask.

Jason fixed his gaze on Freddy and wanted desperately to grab hold of him again. But each time Jason drew near to the torrent of water separating the two of them, he held back.

Protected by the dirty stinking liquid, Freddy grinned slyly.

"So you *are* afraid of something," he sneered.

Another wave of the gloved hand: more pipes burst, releasing jets of water, waves, filling the room, flooding Jason, surrounding Jason, trapping him, swirling around him.

Soon Jason stood knee-deep in water, and still the level was rising.

He looked left.

He looked right.

He reached out a hand ineffectually at the laughing Freddy Krueger.

SIXTEEN

They'd seen it for themselves, they'd felt it, they'd lived through it, but Lori and her friends still had trouble getting their heads round the idea that while someone might be fast asleep right in front of their eyes, that person could be awake in Freddy Krueger's dreamworld—living, breathing, fighting... dying. They might even be in the same room in both worlds, like Freeburg had been when he had spoken to the coma victims. In both reality and in his dreams, Freeburg had been in the Westin Hills patient room.

It was too fucking much.

Linderman sat on the floor of the speeding van.

They'd screwed up the Hypnocil plan, so now they'd gone to Plan "B". Well, they hadn't got a Plan "B" such. In fact, they didn't have any plan at all. No, what they were doing now was pure opportunism.

It was Lori who had come up with the idea. When Jason fell in the hospital corridor, the rest of them had just wanted to run. But she'd stopped them.

She quickly put together some of the things Will had been saying, and she'd somehow guessed that Krueger had been in control of Freeburg, and that it was Krueger who'd put Jason to sleep. And if Krueger wanted someone to fall asleep, that could mean only one thing: Krueger wanted to kill them.

So Krueger wanted Jason dead.

But that alone didn't fully explain why the sleeping body of Jason Voorhees was now lying on the floor in the back of Will's van!

Linderman was clutching two boxes of tranquilizers like his life depended on it. He looked over at Kia. She looked down at Jason's massive body.

Jason lay between them.

They'd tied him up in ropes, chains, tape—everything they could find before dragging the big heavy bastard out of the psychiatric hospital.

Jason's white hockey mask glowed eerily under the funky lights.

***

Up front, Lori was having to explain it all over again. Will could not understand why the guy they were most afraid of—the maniac who'd been trying to kill them, the serial freak who'd murdered most of their friends—was now lying sedated in the back of his van.

Why didn't they just leave him at Westin? Or kill him in his sleep? Or set fire to the motherfucker and drive backwards and forwards over his blackened body with the van until there was nothing left but mud?

"Why don't we just try and do it here?" Will was saying. "Why go all the way to Crystal Lake?"

Lori was in the passenger seat. She had to convince Will. She had to keep them all together. The four of them were Elm Street's only chance. Freddy was attacking Jason right now, inside of Jason's dreams. If Freddy won...

They couldn't stop Freddy.

Not these guys. Not the police. Not the quacks with their bottles of Hypnocil. You need a nightmare to kill a nightmare. Only Jason had the power to kill Freddy, but Jason couldn't kill Freddy inside a dream. He had to do it for real. Somehow.

But then if Jason succeeded, how would he be stopped?

When they'd been down in Freeburg's basement, Linderman had downloaded some files on the Voorhees case. On almost every occasion, Jason slayed at home. If he wasn't already at Crystal Lake, he went back to Crystal Lake soon as he could. So even if they couldn't kill Jason, they might be able to contain him. Take him back to Crystal Lake. Minimize the risk of fallout. Take him home.

"Well, best case scenario," Lori explained. "We need to lure Freddy Krueger out, dream him up and drag him into this world. Best place to do that is where Jason is strongest. If Jason wins, he'll be home. Back where he belongs. Why follow us any more? It'll all be over."

"And if Freddy wins?" asked Will.

Lori didn't answer, so he looked across at her. She had a grave expression on her face.

"Well," shrugged Will, knowing that no one had a better idea, "at least Jason gets home field advantage."

***

Jason was held fast by the water, the virtual fall gushing down around him.

Freddy pushed forward, wading claw-first through the torrent. But —

What?

Jason the hulking masked killer was gone.

In his place was a kid—just a kid. A boy, maybe around eleven years old, and he was huddled up against the wall, shivering with fear.

And yet... and yet, the boy was wearing Jason's hockey mask, though only a pair of Camp Crystal Lake swim trunks covered his puny body. The boy was Jason!

Little Jason was drenched. He whimpered and cowered away as Freddy reached a finger knife towards the little boy's face.

SNICK!

Freddy cut the strap of the hockey mask.

The mask fell and landed with a faint splash on the surface of the water, where it floated, empty, faceless...

Immediately, the boy turned away, hiding his face in shadow.

"Now isn't that sweet?" mocked Freddy, a wicked smile twisting his burned face. "Buried in the heart of every strapping young serial killer is a scared, simpering little cry-baby!"

Freddy reached out and gripped the boy's chin. Then he slowly turned Jason's face into the light.

Jason's skull was unnaturally pale, misshapen, and his face...

Freddy recoiled. "Now there's a face only a mother could love," he spat.

Then he turned Jason's face to look across the boiler room.

There, on an elevated walkway above the water, was the head of Jason's mother, impaled on a wooden stake. Her head. Rotted. Impaled.

"*Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!*"

Little Jason cried out, terrified, and fought to break free.

"Now we're getting somewhere, you ugly little turd!" snarled Freddy, violently shaking Jason's head.

The boy struggled, but he could do nothing as Freddy raised his gloved hand, then suddenly plunged the blade bolted index finger of his murder-glove deep into Jason's bald deformed head.

Blood spurted from the wound, and Jason shrieked, just a terrified little boy, but Freddy pushed deeper, digging and digging with the cruel razor blade, until it had torn a hole deep in Jason's brain.

"Let's dig a little deeper..." Freddy exhaled as he slowly traced the side of Jason's misshapen skull, probing ever deeper into the convolutions, the synapses. and down into the electro-chemical vortex of Jason's memory.

"Now we'll see what really scares ya!"

***

The electrical nerve impulse firing across Jason's mind became a bolt of lightning across a black sky over a shadowy, twisted landscape.

There was something vaguely familiar about this place.

Trees.

A lake.

Camp Crystal Lake!

But this wasn't Crystal Lake as tourists know it. This was the abhorrent bastard perversion of Crystal Lake that festered in Jason's mind.

The trees were made of corpses. The stones on the ground were fractured, shit-filthy skulls. The water on the lake was thick, warm blood. Everything about the place was laced with black desecration. This was Crystal Lake as delineated by the lunatic on his final death march to the gallows. This was Crystal Lake as seen through the

pustulent eyes of a body at the bottom of a plague pit. This was Crystal Lake as dragged screaming through the hatred and baby-fuck violation of a serial killer's mind.

This was Camp Blood.

This was Camp Death.

***

An agonized shrieking tore through the darkness. It was a woman. She was being dragged screaming by her wrists. She was being dragged by Jason! Jason as the tall, unstoppable maniac behind the hockey mask; not Jason the cry-baby hydrophobe.

Jason ignored his victim's cries as he pulled her along the desiccated earth behind him. He just pressed on, relentless, until finally coming to the wreckage of a house.

The walls of the house had mostly fallen down, and the roof was gone. It was as if the house was a bombed-out shell on the front line of a battlefield. Only the door, and some blackened wood around it, remained in place. Jason could have taken any path to step inside the ruin of the house, but he made for the front door—to open it, as if he couldn't see the demolished state the house was in.

Jason flung open the door and threw the woman inside. She screamed once more, but who was there to hear her in this blighted dreamscape?

Freddy Krueger stepped out from the shadows.

He looked around.

Not bad—the kid's got some imagination.

Then he crept forward, ready to watch the next act in The Voorhees Show.

***

The guys had been driving for hours, the beams of the headlamps showing the way through mile after mile of dense forest.

The original idea was that they'd take turns at the wheel, but one quick glance made it clear to Will that he alone was in fit condition to drive. Kia and Linderman were too freaked out, and Lori—Lori was

surprisingly calm, but her mind was elsewhere. She was still working it all out, trying to think through all the options. She was taking a major risk here, and all four of their lives depended on Lori coming up with the right answers.

Linderman and Kia mostly passed the journey in silence, their two frightened faces fixed on one another, their minds racing—full of wordless stress.

Jason twitched.

Linderman was sure of it.

His finger moved.

Linderman grabbed a syringe and filled it with tranquilizer.

"Didn't you just give him one?" asked Kia.

"Better safe than sorry."

Linderman emptied the syringe into Jason's neck. There was no way Linderman was going to let this... this creature wake up while he was still in the van. No way.

Kia looked away. She sighed.

The sound of the engine rumbled beneath them. It had been a long drive.

Linderman looked down at Jason—fast asleep.

Then he looked at the floor, then his shoes, then Kia. She looked great. She also looked scared witless, and more than a little vulnerable. Linderman felt bad. He felt sorry for Kia. He felt sorry for himself, for all of them. They were all caught in this thing.

He cleared his throat.

"So, erm, listen, Kia... I kinda wanted to apologize... you know, for back at the party, when I said all those things to you."

She looked up at him. He was genuine.

"Don't worry about it, Linderman. I can be a bitch with a capital 'C', I know."

"Yeah, and I'm still attracted to you. What's up with that, anyway?"

Kia smiled sweetly. "Wow, Linderman. Is that a spine I see growing in there?"

He laughed—and Jason's left arm shot up straight into the air!

They jumped and screamed in unison—and Jason's arm fell again. He was still, completely still.

Lori spun in her seat and called round: "What's happening back there?"

Linderman looked down at Jason.

"Nightmares."

***

Inside the old Voorhees residence, the walls and ceiling were intact. The place was whole—it had transformed in the space of one step through the front door.

But the air was stale.

The decoration was staler yet. Everything was brown and old-fashioned. Brown wallpaper, brown paint, brown wooden furniture; the place was a museum of bygone taste. Light seeping through a Tiffany lampshade revealed that every surface in the room was covered with a fine layer of dust.

Music drifted eerily from room to room. Muted, crackling bebop through an old wireless radio set. The music suggested the 1950s, but the decor came from a period maybe twenty years earlier.

Jason dragged his victim across the floor. She'd stopped screaming, because he'd killed her.

He pulled her along the hallway carpet, over to the closet. Mutely, he opened the closet door, tossed the dead body inside, then slammed the door shut.

Then Jason turned on his heels, moving slowly, surely like a well-oiled automaton, before heading back down the hall, his measured strides taking him back out through the front door. He closed the door behind him and stalked off in search of his next victim.

She looked exactly the same as the last.

This was the bottom level of the Voorhees psyche. An unending routine of stalk and kill, stalk and kill, stalk and kill.

Freddy emerged from his shadowy hiding place, then took a step towards the closet. He felt curious, excited. He pretty much knew everything there was to know about the dream world, but this excursion into Voorhees's mind had been a rare treat.

A scream—distant, from outside.

Freddy shrugged—another victim, heigh-ho—then went on about his business. He reached out a hand to touch the handle of the closet door.

"I'm dyin' to see what skeletons are hidden in your closet!"

Krueger pulled on the handle and slung the door wide open.

His eyes glinted with amusement.

The other side of the door was filled with water—water again—almost as if there was a glass screen over the doorway and Freddy was looking into a massive aquarium tank. But it wasn't an aquarium. Freddy could see dirt at the bottom, and weeds, and small fish. It was a lake. And that wasn't all Freddy could see.

A bloated white corpse floated across the open doorway.

Freddy sniggered, intrigued.

Then he saw another body, and another.

Suddenly, Freddy realized he wasn't looking at fish at all. He was looking at dead bodies floating in the distance—hundreds of them, blanched corpses adrift in the lake, in what seemed like an infinite watery grave.

A splashing sound caught Freddy's attention. He took a step closer to the closet doorway and looked up into the lake. He could see something up near the surface of the water. It was a young boy, splashing, fighting for his life... drowning...

He understood. Krueger understood!

The undead bastard grinned up at the drowning kid and jubilantly intoned: "Gotcha!"

***

Linderman sank another tube of sleeping fluid into Jason's neck.

He was getting worried. Stabilizing himself by pressing an arm against the side of the van, he leaned forward and called: "We're running seriously low on tranq, guys. I've got enough for maybe one more dose... plus enough for Lori."

Will shot Lori an angry glance. *Damn that crazy plan of hers!*

She didn't notice.

Will looked back at Linderman. "We're almost there."

"Then I better get going," said Lori resolutely. She turned in her seat then clambered up and headed for the back of the vehicle.

"How do you even know this is gonna work?" questioned Will.

"Last time I fell asleep," recalled Lori, "I pulled part of Freddy out from my dream. This time, I'm just gonna bring back all of him."

"But... how are you gonna find him?" Will sounded doubtful.

"I won't have to. Whenever I close my eyes, he's always there. He'll find me."

Damn that crazy plan of hers!

Will dabbed the brake and pulled over to the side of the road. Lori nearly fell, but continued to make her way back. Will grabbed her arm.

"I don't want you to go."

Lori could see how much he really cared for her. There was one hundred per cent pure anguish in his eyes.

"I'm coming back," she said. "Just give me fifteen minutes, then wake me up. I'll bring that bastard back through. You just make sure Jason's waiting for him."

She raised her arm and set the alarm on her digital watch. Fifteen minutes. One five zero zero.

Will wouldn't, couldn't let her go.

True, she was the only one who had a plan, and she was the only one who had any idea how to join up all the dots. They didn't know if she was right, but it was the best strategy they had right now; it made a kind of unbelievable sense. But why did she have to be the one who went and found Freddy?

She had explained it to them, of course, how Freddy attacked his victims one by one. That's why none of them had seen Freddy in their dreams. They didn't know if Lori had been the first to dream Freddy. They didn't know who'd killed Trey, Blake or Gibb; it could have been Jason, Freddy, or both of the messed-up bastards. And if it hadn't have been for Mark's story about his brother and his brother's nightmares about Freddy, Will still might not have believed Lori.

But then he'd seen what had happened to Mark...

Freddy's back!

Yeah, well fuck you, Freddy!

She was right. They had to fight this thing.

Will sighed and drew her close. "I'll make you a deal," he said quietly. "You make sure you come back... and I promise I'll never leave you again."

Of all the shocks Lori had experienced over the last few days, this was the most unexpected. She knew what Will meant, what he was saying.

It took every bit of willpower she had not to burst into a flood of tears. She was already tired and emotional, but this...

Will...

He pulled her close and they kissed. The kiss was pure, passionate. It was a single pure kiss, blessed with love.

***

Moments later, all four of them were in the back of the van—five, if you included the sleeping meat grinder that was Jason Voorhees.

Linderman checked the syringe for air bubbles, tap ping like he'd seen them do on TV, then gently pricked Lori in the arm. He was nervous, but tried his best not to shake—he had no experience of this stuff.

Lori watched Linderman withdraw the needle. The tranquilizer had entered her veins. She looked at Kia. She looked at Will. Then she lay down beside the chained and bound bulk of Jason Voorhees.

"And now I lay me down to sleep," she sang quietly.

This was too much for Will. He hurried back up front, and started up the van again.

As the van crawled back up onto the road, Jason's head shook in time with the suspension. Inside the mask, his eyes were closed but his eyelids were twitching. He was in REM sleep.

He was dreaming.

SEVENTEEN

It was a beautiful sunny day—beautiful sky, beautiful trees. And the lake... the water was calm and clear, the wooded hills and blue sky above meeting their reflection on the surface of the lake with sharp inverse symmetry. The mirror illusion was so clear, it gave Lori a feeling of vertigo. She felt that if she stepped out onto the lake, she would find herself falling up through the sky.

But this was a great place to be, so peaceful. This was a place to relax, not get caught up in irrational fears. Smell the clean air. Listen to the wind rustling through the leaves. Feel the solidity of the place. The lakeside was heaven on earth, and not at all what she'd expected to find. Not at all the kind of place where... Shush!

The lake was just ahead and to the right of Lori as she walked along a road that was little more than a dirt track—even the sandy soil looked appealing beneath the golden sunlight.

Birdsong? Wow, this was wonderful.

Lori had always seen herself as a city person; she didn't think that the beauty and tranquility of nature could get under her skin like this. She almost felt as if she'd come home.

The road led to a sign; two carved totem poles, one each side of the road, holding a large panel of wood, cut in the shape of eagle's wings, and crowned by a painting of a Native American chief in feathered headdress. Below the portrait of the chief were three words made from what looked like bits of tree branch lashed together to form letters: "Camp Crystal Lake."

An additional legend in white paint said: "Welcome Kids Ages 8-12."

So this was it. Camp Crystal Lake.

Lori paused for a moment to look up at the sign. Then she took a deep breath and walked under it, and headed along the dirt road towards the camp.

***

The camp itself was little more than a handful of cabins built next to a narrow wooden pier that ran out onto the lake. The cabins were mostly painted green, but some were furnished with notice boards and old fashioned electric lights.

Walking closer now, Lori could see some canoes lying near the water's edge, and there was a tall lifeguard's chair with a first aid kit and some bright orange life jackets. And there were some green wooden seats for lounging on.

A tall white flagpole stood in an open square at the very center of the camp. Lori smiled—the Stars and Stripes, still a reassuring sight even in these cynical times. Near the flagpole stood some replica tepees and a tall, wooden statue of a brown bear.

Lori liked the feel of the place. It was all about nature and about history—and it was fun, the kinda place Lori would have liked when she was a kid, even if the camp seemed a little old-fashioned.

A black 1940s Chevrolet pickup was parked alongside the camp recreation hall, and the Camp Counselors she could see talking on the veranda of the hall looked like they'd just escaped off the set of *Happy Days* or something. There were two gals and two guys, talking and laughing in what looked like museum—regulation navy blue shorts and starched white T-shirts with stiff round necks. And their hairstyles! They were the kind of cuts Lori had seen in her family photo album—black and white pictures of her parents, aunts and uncles when they'd been kids.

She didn't get it. She knew Crystal Lake was a bit out of the way, but she didn't expect it to be so locked down on the whole Elvis thing.

She could see some of the kids now. They were all dressed in the same white shirt and dark blue shorts as the Counselors—not forgetting their choice of either white or blue ankle socks.

The kids were playing a game. There were around twenty of them, and they were all running and shouting:

"Freak-show! Freak-show!"

Freak what?

Lori could see now that the kids were all running and shouting because they were chasing someone, a small boy at the front of the

pack. Not only that, but they were pushing and shoving him. And taunting.

"Freak-show! Freak-show!"

What kind of sick game was this?

The kids caught up with their victim and formed a circle round him. The boy couldn't be much more than ten, eleven years old. Lori couldn't quite see him in the middle of the crowd, but she could hear him running, his shoes scuffing the dirt as he lurched this way and that, to break out of the ring tightening in around him.

Lori moved closer to see just what the hell was going on. It all looked a little too serious for her liking. This wasn't a game; the kids were being cruel.

As she drew near, she saw a girl pull a cloth sack over the trapped boy's head. "Cover that ugly face, Jason!" she teased.

The boy, Jason, stumbled around, blinded by the bag over his head.

Another boy pushed him to the ground. "Monster!" he shouted.

Lori couldn't believe it. They were all young boys and girls, all sons and daughters of someone, somewhere. Bright young things, clean-cut boys, cute kids. One day, they would grow up to be lawyers, doctors. These brats were the future of America, and here they were tormenting a kid just because of the way he looked.

Outraged, Lori walked over to the teenage Counselors who stood talking outside the recreation hall. There were two couples, touching, flirting. They weren't paying any attention to what was going on among the kids.

"Hey!" Lori shouted. "Shouldn't you be doing something?"

They ignored her completely.

"Hey! Why don't you help him?" she called again.

No response; they just kept on gazing into each others' eyes and smiling.

Lori could hear the kids beating on Jason, could hear him yelping with pain and fear. But nothing could prepare her for the shock of what she saw when she walked up onto the porch of the recreation hall.

One of the pairs of Counselors were actually having sex.

They were standing, the girl with her back to the wall, the guy up in front of her, thrusting, both their shorts round their ankles.

The guy had his back to Lori. He was too busy humping his gal senseless to notice Lori's presence at all.

She couldn't believe it. It was the middle of the day. in the open. The kids could see them, and they were screwing?

What kind of place was Camp Crystal Lake?

Lori grabbed the grunting Counselor from behind.

"Beat it! Can't you see I'm busy?" he chided, not even bothering to turn round to look at her. Not missing a beat in his humping.

Sheer disbelief wavered through Lori's voice. "You're not coming?"

Now the Camp Counselor paused in his labors. He turned round to face Lori, the words "Camp Counselor" printed on his clean white shirt—but his head and shoulders were the bald, burned raw visage of *Freddy Krueger!*

And the girl pinned by Krueger's dick to the wall? She was pallid, blue in the face. Freddy Krueger was screwing a corpse.

"It's not my fault, this bitch is dead on her feet! *Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!*"

Lori fell back, horrified, her mind spiraling away from her.

Now... now she was beginning to understand.

Just then, little Jason broke free of the mob of cruel little bastards and ran crying towards the lake. He ripped the cloth sack off his head, and now Lori could see that his head was huge, pale, bald and deformed.

"Run, you little baby! Run!" screamed the kids.

The boy tore off down the long floating pier that led out over the lake. His tear-streaked face was a picture of unbearable anguish.

***

The van was going full speed now.

Kia checked her watch.

"It's been two minutes," she said with a look of determination in her eyes.

Linderman responded by slamming another injection into the decaying skin of Jason's neck.

"That's the last of the tranq," he declared. "We're out."

Lori still lay beside Jason, rocking on the floor of the van. Her eyes were twitching. She was dreaming.

Both Lori and Jason were dreaming—and in the world of dreams, Freddy Krueger held all the bloody aces in the fingers of his razor-gloved hand.

***

As soon as Lori heard the splash she raced to the end of the dock. She didn't know if the boy had slipped or if he jumped, and right now she didn't care. She had a boy's life to save.

"Hang on!" she shouted, as she knelt down on the wooden floor and leant forward to reach into the water.

She could see his hand.

Thrashing.

Fighting for life in the water.

It was inches away.

Just a bit further....

A bit more...

There!

Lori braced herself then pulled hard, lifting Jason up out of the water.

Jason.

His pale, ugly white face.

His uneven, bulbous, insipid eyes.

His lifeless lips.

His ugly, distorted squat features.

His repellent corpse-mass of a head; alive and yet abhorrent in the eyes of nature. A *thing*, a satanic genetic deviant who should never have been born.

Jason the mutant boy, who would one day become Jason the brutal killing machine.

Despite herself, and despite the fear in Jason's eyes and his need for help, Lori let go of him. The shock of seeing Jason had been too much for her.

Water splashed over Lori's flared jeans as Jason tried to swim to the surface. But he couldn't, and his head was soon below the surface of the lake again.

Lori shook her head. She couldn't believe what she'd just done. Was she any different than the kids who'd put the bag over Jason's head?

Quickly, she extended her open hand down into the water. She could see him. He was flailing, drowning.

No!

She was losing him.

He was sinking, dying and it had all been her fault. If she could save Jason, then maybe the whole nightmare at Crystal Lake would never happen. He wouldn't have to drown, so his mother wouldn't need to avenge herself against the Camp Counselors. The whole bloody cycle of violence and vengeance that had blighted Crystal Lake for almost fifty years need never start.

Lori reached down, leaning as far into the water as she could, and grabbed him. Up, up, up he strove, helped by Lori to...

Water showered all over Lori, as if a depth charge had just exploded. But it was Krueger launching himself up from deep within the lake, so that he could grab hold of Jason's head and force the little retarded bastard back down into the water where he fucking belonged. Freddy howled with glee.

Lori's grip was broken in an instant and soon Krueger had his fingers wrapped round the boy's throat, strangling Jason while dunking his ugly fucking head into the water. again and again and again.

The boy's hands flailed.

"NO!" screamed Lori.

She didn't know how Freddy was able to stand or float in the water like that, but she understood the deal. She knew that the only Law of Physics in the nightmare realm was that Freddy Krueger could do whatever the hell he liked.

"Ah, to be young and drowning again!" panted Freddy, his face growing cold and emotionless as he held Jason's head steady under the water.

Bubbles broke the surface of the lake.

Jason's last breath.

Lori could just hear Jason's voice. He was gurgling in terror!

Damn you, Krueger!

She was powerless.

And now Krueger had Jason where he wanted him. He had gone into Jason's mind—found Jason's fear. And now Jason was weak, afraid, Freddy could kill him. Freddy could kill Jason Voorhees in his childhood nightmare, thereby killing Voorhees in real life.

There would be no more Friday the Thirteenths around Crystal Lake ever again.

***

"Something's wrong," warned Kia.

She had seen Jason's massive chest heave, his back arcing high above the floor of the van. And there was a gasping sound coming through the air holes of his beat-up hockey mask.

"He's choking!"

Kia scurried away to the front of the van.

Linderman was about to join her when he saw something incredible: water coming up through the holes in the mask. And it wasn't just a trickle, there was a whole flood of water pushing up through the gaps.

"He's *drowning!*" said Linderman, his voice spiked with incredulity. "Freddy's killing him!"

"Well, do something!" called Will from the front of the van. "We need him alive!"

And they did.

If Jason died, Lori's plan would be useless. And if he died while Lori was still asleep, what would happen to her? Will guessed it would be impossible for Lori and Jason to somehow share the same

nightmare, but if Krueger finished with Voorhees, it would only be a matter of time before he found Lori.

Linderman was still having trouble processing Will's orders. "What are we supposed to do?" he laughed grimly. "Give him mouth-to-mouth?"

Will let silence do the talking for him.

Linderman looked over at Kia. She was already looking at him. Their eyes locked.

Mouth-to-mouth?

"Hell no!" said Kia, shaking her head and waving her arms. "Uh-uh. *No... way!*"

"You have to!" argued Linderman. "I've had asthma since I was six! I don't have the lung power!"

Kia looked down at Jason.

Water had now spilled all over his filthy ripped-up jacket. and his body was racked with spasms of asphyxiation.

No way!

***

It's only a nightmare—it's only a nightmare—it's only a nightmare.

Lori looked at her watch. Fifteen minutes.

Soon. Soon.

Her face was horror-stricken as she watched Freddy continue to force little boy Jason down into the muddy depths of Crystal Lake.

It's only a nightmare.

It's only a nightmare!

NO!

Lori dived forward and grabbed hold of Jason. She would do everything within her power to save the boy from Freddy's evil plans.

***

Linderman held Stubbs's revolver at the ready, the barrel mere inches away from Jason's head.

Kia was trembling.

No, delete that.

Kia was scared to death and shaking like a dog with its tail on fire.

Which only showed how big her balls were when she reached down with her well-manicured fingers to touch the bottom of Jason's hockey mask.

Linderman gripped the handle of the gun tighter and tighter.

Kia tensed, ready. She moved the mask, lifting it ever so slightly up and to the side, exposing the full-on fetid canker of Jason's mouth.

Kia almost hurled. Instead she just whimpered. "Eeeooooough!"

"You can do it, Kia." Oh yeah, easy for Linderman to be a cheerleader. He wasn't the one who had to... "You can do it."

Good job Kia didn't see Linderman cringe when she leant in close to Jason.

Oh hell...

She could see the moldy gash of his lips.

The stench...

She leant closer. Her lips, soft, full, young, tender.

That godawful stink...

His hole glistening, withered, pulsating.

Their lips were close, almost touching. One slight jerk of the van, and their lips would touch.

The sweet sickly stench of maggot shit... ack!

Suddenly it was Kia who needed oxygen. Her throat... she was choking!

"Kia!" shouted Linderman.

He had seen Jason's arm spring to life, immediately locking a meat-hook of a hand round the girl's slender throat! Her eyes began to bulge and she opened and closed her mouth with an awful ratchet sound, trying desperately to claw some oxygen down into her lungs.

Jason sat up, snapping his bonds as if they were made of paper.

KTING! THWICK!

The ropes and chains just fell away as Jason awoke from a bad dream.

Linderman fell back and pulled the trigger. The shot went wild, narrowly missing Will up front, shattering the windshield. Almost immediately the van began to lurch from left to right, rocking

Linderman to his knees and flinging Kia in all directions, but always with her throat locked in place by Jason's grip.

Jason was now breaking the ties around his legs, never relaxing his hold on Kia for a second. If the van hadn't gone out of control, he would have broken her neck by now. As it was, he'd had to adjust his grip, content to strangle her to death instead.

Jason moved with a fury that had rarely been seen.

He had been attacked.

He had been put to sleep.

He had been tricked by the creature who pretended to be his mother.

And he had been forced to reveal his innermost fears. He, a creature without fear, a creature who could not be killed—had been forced to admit his weakness. And that weakness had been used to hurt him, hurt him as he had never been hurt before.

Jason raged with erratic loathing, his body racked with a vengeful death-force. With every atom of unbending evil he could muster, he now set about the overkill of the puny victim gripped in his murderous hands.

Will slammed the brakes.

Wheel skid! The van lurched and spun sideways.

Will yanked at the wheel.

Jason stumbled, Kia falling to the floor of the van with a loud crack.

Linderman tripped, dropped, bumped his head in a glancing blow —then raised his gun to fire.

Jason raised his arms and dived, hurling his massive body through the air, ready to crush, kill and maim the insect with the gun.

The van left the road and rolled, sending the passengers tumbling and screaming—all except Jason, who in brute silence was thrown back into the rear double-doors of the van, breaking them wide open.

Jason suddenly found himself hurled out through the back of the van, frustration tearing through his every psychotic muscle as rolled down the side of the road, his plastic hockey mask hitting into small rocks and tree trunks before his spinning form finally came to rest on the yellow-lined tarmac.

Further along the road, the van was sliding on its side—scraping, screeching down the two-lane blacktop, sparks ascending into the night sky.

Inside the van, three teenagers cried out for their lives.

EIGHTEEN

Jason was gone...

Freddy waved his hands through the water, slicing the lake in two with his glove, but the drowning retard was gone. He'd had him. Voorhees was dead meat, but...

Lori dragged herself away from the water and crawled back onto the dock. She looked at her watch. Almost there.

Lori!

Freddy stared at her from inside the lake. His eyes narrowed. This bitch. She'd tried to save Jason. She'd fought with Freddy. Pulled Jason out of the water, given the little brat some air, enough air to keep him alive long enough for the tranquilizer to wear off on the real Jason. She'd saved him. *She'd saved Jason Voorhees.*

Freddy darted his head at her and snarled, "You!"

And suddenly, every ounce of rage Freddy had ever felt—rage for his years of imprisonment in the abyss—rage for every victim Jason had deprived him of—rage for Jason slipping through his sickly abattoir hands—

Rage!

Freddy Krueger clenched his fists, tensed his body, then forced his volcanic fury through every corpuscle and twisted cell of his being.

Lori screamed till she thought her lungs would burst.

Slowly, before her terrified eyes, Freddy began to distort, to change—his very skin becoming an expression of incendiary wrath.

In the space of mere moments, Lori found herself staring into the eyes of something utterly feral. She was already terrified of Krueger, but this transformation, this apotheosis into the embodiment of a hellish dream demon...

His eyes had become narrow yellow slits with a dead black dot of a pupil. His ears had become pointed, like those of a devil. His brows had become arched, forming an eye-mask of hatred. His lips were black, his teeth jagged and sharp. His whole face had taken on the look of eternal evil. While his skin—his skin was now the color of

blood, only more pitted, more sunken, more a tangle of veins inside a shadow of psychotic slaughter.

He raised his right hand. The glove. The blades were longer, sharper, more curved—truly now a nightmare of precision-steel talons.

Whoooommmm!

Darkness fell across the lake.

With a cut of his hand, Freddy had killed the day. And as Freddy's rage continued to build, a storm began to rise.

In the midnight blackness, all Lori could see were those two yellow eyes. The eyes of snarling hatred. The eyes of death.

Krueger flew up and out of the lake as if sprung from the water, and landed right before Lori, who fell back onto the floor of the dock, cringing in terror as Freddy made forward to kill her.

If evil could kill by evil alone, she would already have been dead a thousand times over. Lori was paralyzed in the waves of unbridled animosity that ripped out of the hellishly transformed razor-killer.

Beep beep-beep.

Beep beep-beep.

Freddy glanced.

The alarm on Lori's wristwatch.

Fifteen minutes!

Not giving herself time to think, Lori leapt to her feet and lunged forward straight into Freddy's chest. He snarled as she threw her arms around him.

It was time.

"Wake me up!" she shouted. "I've got him! I've got him!"

***

Beep-beep-beep.

What was that?

There was a gentle hissing sound from the blown engine as the van lay on its side.

All else was silence.

Save for that sound.

Beep-beep-beep.

Beep-beep-beep.

Will came to, held in place by his seatbelt—it had saved his life. He glanced at himself in the rear-view. Some minor cuts, bruising. He'd been damned lucky.

Lucky?

What… It came back to him now. The gunshot… The crash…

Jason!

Will looked back.

Kia and Linderman were lying on what used to be the inside wall of the van. They were both beginning to wake up. Like Will, they'd been stunned unconscious and shaken about. But it didn't look as if they'd had anything serious.

Then he saw Stubbs's gun.

Will unfastened his belt, then climbed into the back of the van, from where he snatched up the recently fired revolver. It was still warm.

Beep-beep-beep.

Beep-beep-beep.

That little sound again.

Outside the van!

Will left Kia and Linderman to come around, and hurried out through the broken rear doors.

Lori!

She was lying on the road, a trickle of blood running down her forehead. Fearing the worst, Will rushed forward to Lori's side.

Thank God, her head was moving. She was alright. She…

She was asleep.

Will shook her. "Lori! Wake up! Lori!"

But she just kept stirring in her sleep and now she was murmuring something. And where the hell was Jason?

They had no time for this.

"Lori!"

Beep-beep-beep.

Beep-beep-beep.

It was the alarm on her wristwatch! Fifteen minutes!

Kia and Linderman had climbed out of the wreckage of the van and were now standing next to Will.

Will turned off the alarm on Lori's watch. If he couldn't wake her, that stupid, annoying thing wouldn't.

Where were they?

It was dark, damned dark, and they seemed to be in the middle of a forest.

Just slightly ahead, a dirt trail led off road, to the right.

The van burst into flames.

"Lori!" shouted Will, instinctively shielding her from the heat of the blast.

Kia saw something over by the dirt road. She walked over and…

"Look," she said.

Will and Linderman followed her finger as she pointed down to something lying on the ground.

Illuminated by the fire from the burning vehicle, they saw an old battered sign. It was broken and covered with moss. They could just see the words on the sign. It said: "Camp Crystal Lake."

"Um… g… guys?" Linderman trembled. "Where's Jason?"

He was right.

Will cast a quick glance over into the dense woodland, then he scooped the unconscious Lori up into his arms.

"Start running," he said.

Kia and Linderman didn't move. They were too busy looking for Jason.

"Just go!" barked Will. "GO!"

Then he hoisted Lori up over his shoulder and struggled as quickly as he could along the old abandoned road that would lead the four of them to the site of Camp Crystal Lake.

***

Beep-beep-be…

It stopped. The alarm had stopped! Lori looked down at her watch in panic.

Holy fucking shit!

If the alarm had stopped that would mean… That would mean Lori was trapped in the dream world…

With Freddy Krueger!

"What's wrong, Lori?" sneered Freddy. "You know, you're on my time now."

Then he was at her.

This time, the bitch was dead!

Lori ran screaming as the raggedy razor man ran spastically right at her. Her foot caught something.

He laughed—slashed at her with his glove…

She tripped, fell…

And kept on falling… into a seemingly infinite blackness.

***

WHAM!

Lori crashed into the ground, the air punched right out of her lungs, and a bone cracking in her back—one of her ribs.

She lay still for a long, long while. Then slowly. painfully, she climbed to her feet.

This was the nightmare—the game—she had to keep moving… had to stay alive until she woke up.

"No, no…"

She was back in the front yard of 1428 Elm Street. Her home. The front door was red—its original color. The roses on the trellis were all dead.

It was night. Elm Street was all wrong. And Lori was suddenly wearing a white nightgown.

"No!"

She turned to run, and her foot was on the last step at the top of her living room stairs inside the house.

She screamed in sheer blind fear.

It was happening.

The nightmare.

The Nightmare on Elm Street.

"*Wake me up! Wake me up!*"

Down below, at the foot of her stairs, stood her Dad, Dr Campbell. He turned to face her and hurriedly started climbing up toward her.

He had a knife in his hand, ready.

***

Lori's comatose form weighed heavily on Will as he ran along the dirt road into camp, but he didn't give it a second's thought. All that mattered was that he carried her to safety—away from Jason.

Though free from any such encumbrance, Kia and Linderman found it hard to keep up with Will as he maintained his breakneck pace through the darkness.

Finally, they made it through the woodland into the center of camp.

Camp? A few rundown cabins held together by moss and cobwebs. Some camp. In the near distance they saw what looked like an old recreation hall. This seemed to be the most sturdy of the buildings, so that was where Will decided they'd rest.

It was only when they were half way across the open camp square that they saw the new construction site. Someone was building on Camp Crystal Lake!

A banner affixed to some scaffolding read: "Camp Crystal Lake Welcomes You Back. Future Home of Lake side Resorts."

They were building a fucking holiday home here! Something new, to bring more people. More victims!

Will turned away from the sight and continued on his way to the ramshackle hall.

***

What neither Will nor any of his friends knew was just how much trouble the local authorities had had in deciding what to do with Camp Crystal Lake. On paper, it was a fabulous site. Great views, natural scenery, peaceful, remote, diverse wildlife: Crystal Lake had everything.

Trouble was, it also had an unkillable maniac.

The first time they thought they'd got rid of Voorhees, the people of Crystal Lake demolished most of the camp. The second time they thought he was finished, they renamed Crystal Lake to Forest Green, in a feeble bid to erase the town's bloody past.

The third time—or was it the fourth? Whatever. When they thought Jason was dead that other time, they realized he was the town's most famous son, and some of the more cynical townsfolk realized there were some tourist bucks to be made by renaming the town back to Crystal Lake.

Then they heard he'd gone up coast to New York.

Then they were told he'd come back to Crystal Lake and been killed by his own fucking niece!

Okay, so there was no logic to this Voorhees thing. He died. He came back. He vanished. He showed up. There were no rules with this lunatic. But inbetween the attacks there were at least a few years of peace and quiet.

It had been thus for a few years now, and so the decision had been made to sell the land to a development conglomerate. That way, Crystal Lake got some money, no kids were put in any more danger—so no more guilt trips—and if Jason did come back... Well, the people who'd be staying here would be wealthy adults. They'd be able to look after themselves.

As the mayor said at the time: "You know, when people just calm down, and we put aside all the hysteria and wild speculation, you can deal with the Voorhees problem just like any other problem: throw money at it, and it'll go away."

In essence, the authorities in the town of Crystal Lake hadn't got a clue.

***

Lori realized with relief that her father couldn't see her, but only after he'd walked up the carpeted stairs, and gone right past her.

Somehow Lori knew what was coming and she didn't want to see it. She saw the knife in her father's hand. She had seen it before, in her imagination, when Will had told her the revelation that had

turned her entire world inside out. She knew where he must be heading.

She remembered what Will had told her. She knew that Freddy was somehow in her mind.

"Daddy, no!" she cried. "Don't, Daddy! Don't do it!"

But he didn't hear her.

Dr Campbell rounded the corner of the landing and strode swiftly in the direction of his bedroom where, Lori knew, he would use the knife to stab his wife to death.

***

Carefully, Will lowered Lori's unconscious body to the floor.

Behind him, Linderman had found a fallen wooden plank and was using it to bar the door of the recreation hall. No one was getting in now unless Linderman wanted them to.

The place was a wreck, and it stank of mould and dirt. It looked like no one had been in there for years. The hall itself was dilapidated and ramshackle, with rotting camp equipment strewn everywhere.

Kia went rummaging through the discarded stuff and came up with a kerosene lamp. Amazingly, it still had some fuel left in it.

She pulled a lighter from her pocket and lit the small fabric wick. Let there be light.

That's one thing, at least.

Kia set the lamp down on the dusty floor next to Lori. will knelt beside her, watching Lori as she moved in her sleep.

Lori wasn't murmuring anymore; she was talking quite clearly.

"No. No. Noooo."

Will slapped her across the face.

He didn't want to hurt her, but if what she'd said was right, she could die in her sleep. Freddy could kill her in her dreams. Whatever the truth, Will needed her. Now.

He grabbed her shoulders, lifted her back up off the floor and shook her.

"Come on, Lori! Wake up!"

***

Dr Campbell kicked open the bedroom door.

Inside, he could see his bed. The sheets were raised in a sort of mound, but the mound was moving, as if someone was thrashing under the covers.

Wasting no more time, he raised the knife and stepped forward.

Lori ran in after him, powerless to stop him as he pulled back the sheets.

"Please, Daddy," she cried. "Don't kill her!"

But when the sheets fell to the bedroom floor, Lori saw that her mother was already under attack.

Lori's Mom was alone on the bed, her body shaking and thrashing beneath the onslaught of an invisible foe.

A cut formed on her body, a deep slash down from right shoulder to left hip, but no one was near.

Lori watched in soul-shredding horror as the carve up unfolded in front of her.

Her father still held the knife, but he was nowhere near Lori's Mom. He just stood at the foot of the bed, his face showing as much fear and horror as anything Lori could muster.

Another tear ripped its way across the agonized body on the bed.

Something was killing her. Something unseen. Lori's Mom was being butchered.

Fighting against his own terror, Campbell could take no more of this. He lunged forward and stabbed at the empty air above the twitching body of his wife. And again. And then he slashed. Side to side. Up and down, cutting the air with the carving knife.

Yet still his wife was being slaughtered, her blood spilling over the floor and walls, even onto the doctor himself.

Campbell stabbed a further time, his eyes filled with tears.

"Come out and face me, Freddy!" he bellowed, impotent and heartbroken.

Freddy?

Lori stopped dead in her tracks. Freddy!

He *knew*. Her Dad knew about Freddy. He had known about Freddy all along.

This is what Will saw four years ago. Dr Campbell wasn't attacking his wife; he was trying to save her. When Will saw Campbell lunge forward with the kitchen knife, he'd mistakenly thought Campbell was trying to stab his wife. In reality, Campbell was trying to defend her against Freddy Krueger.

Campbell was the only one who knew who the real killer was. And that's why he couldn't say anything. He couldn't tell people his wife had been killed in her dreams by some ghost. So when Will accused him, the doctor had to deal with Will. And he had to deal with Will quickly. even if that meant locking the boy away, because the doc tor had to complete his vital mission.

Out of all the people in authority in Springwood, only Campbell knew the truth about Freddy. He had to act fast. He had to talk to Sheriff Williams, to persuade Williams of the truth about Fred Krueger.

Campbell researched past cases. He quickly discovered that Krueger had attacked people in their dreams before. He'd even attacked the previous owners of Campbell's own home, 1428 Elm Street.

As a medical psychologist, Campbell also knew some of the history of Westin Hills, but he didn't have any of the details as to why the hospital had been shut down. But when he managed to lay his hands on some highly confidential case files—files that should long have been destroyed—it all became clear.

Freddy had been killing kids at Westin Hills. An intern there, Nancy Thompson—who Campbell couldn't believe had also once lived at 1428 Elm—had tried to save the kids by prescribing them a controversial drug, a dream suppressant called Hypnocil. Thompson did this with the help of a colleague, Dr Neil Gordon. But eventually, the two of them were overruled and fired by their supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Simms. However, once the kids were brought back off the Hypnocil regime, they all died.

So did Nancy Thompson, Neil Gordon and Elizabeth Simms.

The head of the institution, Dr Carver, was bankrupted by a whole series of successful lawsuits brought against him by bereaved parents, and Westin Hills was shut down.

So it was clear what Campbell had to do.

He managed to get Westin Hills re-opened and brought back into life as a fully-functioning medical facility. Then, with the help of the police, he had anyone who was having the Krueger nightmares assigned to the institution. where they were forcibly treated with Hypnocil.

Campbell and Williams had no idea how to kill Krueger, but they knew he was real, and they knew how to contain him.

Campbell had done what he'd done to Will—and all the other kids—because that was the only way he knew how to save people's lives. It was the only way he knew how to protect Springwood from the evil of Freddy Krueger.

One day Campbell hoped to find a way to kill Krueger. He wanted nothing more than to exact revenge on the bastard who had murdered his wife. Ultimately, Campbell hoped to see the day when Westin Hills could be closed for good.

All of this had been kept from Lori—she would never understand—but what was now clear to Lori was that her Mom had not been killed by Dr Campbell. Her Mom had been killed by—

Freddy suddenly appeared on top of Lori's dying mother, his claw raised to slash her wide open and send her to Hell.

Dr Campbell couldn't see Krueger. He just kept stabbing the thin air with his knife. Only Lori could see the maniac.

And Freddy could see Lori. He turned to look at the horrified girl. His new demonic features were spattered with her Mom's blood.

"I've always had a thing for the whores who live in this house," he rapped.

Then he plunged his five cutting blades deep into Mrs Campbell's chest, ripping upwards and downwards, deep into her lungs, tearing open her heart, gashing her pulsating red viscera into a polyester mattress grave.

If Lori hadn't been deafened by her own screams, she would have been deafened by her father's.

NINETEEN

"I—I think someone's outside," said Kia.

Someone? SOMEONE? Come on, Kia, you can only mean Jason fucking Voorhees!

In frantic desperation, Will tried everything he could to wake Lori.

If Jason found them before they could wake her, they might have to leave her here.

No. He couldn't think that.

Will looked over at Kia. She was doing good, but Linderman...

***

Lori ran screaming from the shambolic butchery of her parents' bedroom and fled down the hall, her soul crushed by the sound of her Dad's sobbing coming from the murder scene she'd just left behind.

Suddenly she was flat on her face. The floor was rippling, undulating, an unnatural motion that had ripped her off her feet.

Krueger was having no such problems keeping his balance. He walked in an almost leisurely manner behind her, then grabbed her by the hair.

Before she had time to react, Lori had been pulled agonizingly to her feet, then flung into the thick glass of an upstairs window. The pane cracked and smashed as she bounced off it and fell to the floor —her face and arms now a mess of cuts and bruises.

Krueger was tossing her about like a rag doll.

They were all the same, these fucking teenagers, with their droopy doe eyes, and their pathetic sense of self importance. The problem with these girls was when they reached the age when they became all maternal. They just got in the way. They forced themselves between Freddy and the real girls he wanted to play with: the cute little girls... the children.

He so looked forward to playing around with little girls again.

But first he had to deal with this sanctimonious, brooding slut.

Lori lay on the hallway floor.

No energy left.

No strength—*the pain!*

No fight...

He grabbed her by the hair and dragged her along the floor, putting her just where he wanted her, so that he could smack this bitch up once and for all.

***

"*Lori! Noooo!*"

Will almost fell back in shock.

Lori was moving across the floor! Her body had jerked, then started sliding, as if someone was pulling her along on invisible strings. It wasn't possible.

Even if Krueger was somehow attacking her in her dreams, how did that explain this? What was pulling her in the real world?

Oh god...

Cuts suddenly appeared on Lori's arms and chest, and she began to writhe in pain.

Will didn't know what to do.

Linderman was no use.

Kia...

She hadn't noticed. She'd been too busy watching the window where she thought she saw Jason a second ago.

Kia backed away from the grimy sheet of glass. Something was moving outside, she was sure of it.

There! Not the window now, but through gaps between the boards that made up the cabin wall—a glimpse of the white hockey mask.

There! A glint of machete in the moonlight.

"It's him!" she shouted, in no doubt now. "He's here!"

Good timing.

The plank wall exploded as Jason hurled his mass through the aged, rotted wood. Debris filled the room, showering Will and Lori with dust, dirt and bits of broken wooden pieces. One of the shattered planks landed against the kerosene lamp. The lamp fell

and broke against the floor. Almost immediately, the floor of the recreation hall was set on fire.

The room was filled with debris, and old bric-a-brac, all nice and dry, all perfect fuel for a bonfire.

Linderman and Kia scattered, but—despite his earlier fears—Will would not leave Lori's side.

Jason looked in at the four of them, then made his move.

The impassive murderous bastard carved forward for the kill when Will whipped the police revolver out from his belt and let loose some point-blank cordite action.

Blam!

The first slug hit Jason in the shoulder.

Blam!

The second spat a chunk of dead meat out of Jason's chest.

Jason lashed out with his machete, catching the gun. Will, eager to keep his hand, quickly let go of the revolver, and looked on in anguish as the gun was sent flying through the air and out through the collapsed wall Jason had demolished.

Jason took a second swing, a downward stroke that was sure to disembowel Lori, were it not for Will, who dived in the way of the machete, and valiantly took a glancing blow right across the side of his ribcage.

Will cried out and clutched at his side. His fingers could feel the soft flesh that had separated on both sides of the meat-chopping machete gash.

He was cut real bad, and he was bleeding.

***

Lori was finished. It was all over.

She lay on the hallway floor, her eyes closed. She was trembling. She had no skills for this. She wasn't trained. And it was in his world, with all his rules.

The great plan had gone wrong.

She was supposed to wake up, bring him out and let Jason Voorhees deal with him. But Krueger had drowned the deformed boy

and Lori hadn't woken up.

And just to add the final touch, Freddy had shown her that he himself had killed Lori's Mom.

Bastard...

Freddy stepped forward, then dropped to kneel over her, one leg on either side of her bloody prostrate form.

"Welcome to my world, bitch!"

This was the end.

He leaned forward, breathing heavily. The stench of decay and burning coming off him must have been what Hell smelled like.

Bastard...

"I should warn you, princess..." he stroked her leg with one of his razored fingers, the sharp tip of the blade leaving just enough of a line so as not to break the skin. He lifted her nightgown and now chose to slice a tiny cut on her inner thigh.

"The first time..." he breathed noxiously, "tends to be a little messy."

BASTARD!

Lori cried out and knotted the frayed hem of Krueger's fucked-up red and green sweater in her fists. This was all she had left. This was her last chance.

***

Will waited for the second machete blow. Anything he could do to protect Lori—

"Get away from them."

Linderman!

Ignoring the command, Jason raised his machete over Will and Lori.

But Linderman's threat wasn't mere desperate bravado.

He and Kia had grabbed both sides of a heavy wooden table. Quickly, ignoring the fire spreading around them, they ran forward with the table and flung it into place over Will and Lori just as the machete came down.

Two inches of solid oak were all that came between Will and bloody machete death.

THUNKK!

Immediately, Jason tried to pull the weapon free, but it wouldn't budge, and Jason soon found himself lifting both the machete and the table it had wedged into, off the floor.

Linderman and Kia hadn't finished with him yet. Fuelled by fear and adrenaline, the two of them had found a couple of makeshift weapons and were now charging straight at him. This was their moment—now, while Jason hadn't got the machete free.

Kia jumped up on the very table Jason was struggling with and smacked him again and again around the side of the head with a boat paddle.

She hit him on each syllable: "Back-your-moth-er-fucking-broke-ass-UP!"

Not enough.

Kia did not know who she was dealing with. She didn't know at all.

Jason swept a casual backhanded blow at Kia and knocked her off the table and clear across the room.

Which was the signal for Linderman to enter the fray.

Linderman really didn't want to be here. In fact, he'd rather be anywhere than here. In fact, he'd rather eat a steaming bowl of dog crap than be standing here right now. Here, in front of this unstoppable freak of insanity. The same freak who'd nearly killed Linderman twice already, and with that same fucking machete.

But this was surely their last stand. Lori was unconscious, Will was wounded, Kia had just gone down—Linderman was the only one who could stop Jason now.

He'd found a flag pole, an old moth-eaten Stars and Stripes still attached, and was now holding the pole in both hands like a spear.

If he played his cards right, he could jab at Jason, maybe stab him, while keeping him at pole's length.

Once.

Got him.

Twice.

Speared him again.

But both blows had all but rebounded off Jason, merely knocking him back a little. Jason didn't seem to care. He was only being delayed in his single-minded efforts to retrieve the machete buried in the tabletop over Will and Lori.

This didn't worry Linderman. Given enough time he could probably...

Jason yanked the machete free, causing the table to lurch up off the ground, and sending Jason's arm swinging back through the air unexpectedly with released momentum, catching Linderman by accident.

Linderman was only a skinny kid. When the back of Jason's forearm crashed into him, he was flung back, away from the fight, and sent slamming into the far wall.

Linderman couldn't see it, but a rusty nail stuck out from the wall. The nail cut through his skin and pierced the teenager's kidney. He groaned and sank to the floor.

The fire had now taken hold of much of the recreation hall, and the room was becoming thick with smoke.

Jason stood upright amid the billowing flames. He held the machete in his hand.

The four friends were beaten—if not dead, they soon would be.

It was good to be home.

***

Will was bleeding badly from his wound, but Lori still hadn't come round.

And the place was on fire.

Ever since the table had covered them up, Will had rested, tried to save up some energy. He'd heard the fighting. He'd heard the shouts and cries of his friends, but he had no idea how things stood, or where Jason—

Shit! The fire. They had to get away from the fire.

Sluggish, weak, bleeding, Will grabbed Lori and started to drag her out from under the table. He had to get her out of there, get her to safety.

No!

Too late he noticed a small piece of burning debris slip from the roof of the cabin. And it was falling toward Lori.

Normally, a chunk of wood that size wouldn't be big enough to cause any harm, but it was on fire!

Will tried to pull Lori out of the way, but even before he started the attempt, he knew he would fail.

The blazing fragment landed on Lori's arm.

***

Lori screamed from the burn.

She shrieked in pain and terror.

In her house on Elm Street, where she still had that bastard Krueger's sweater wrapped up in her arms.

***

Lori screamed from the burn.

She shrieked in pain and terror.

In the burning recreation hall, where she woke up still holding onto that bastard Krueger's sweater in her arms.

Will couldn't believe his eyes.

It was all true! Freddy Krueger! Here.

Everything she'd said. Everything Mark had said, and his brother Bobby... True, all of it, true!

Freddy was still crouched over Lori, his glove raised for the kill.

"Die, bit—"

This wasn't Elm Street?

This wasn't her dream.

Where...?

Krueger turned round and saw Will looking back at him. He took in the building they were in—derelict, a cabin—and the flames, flames everywhere.

And then Freddy looked up, right into the hockey masked eyes of Jason Voorhees.

***

Jason towered over Krueger and the girl.

On seeing Krueger, Jason's eyes shone with recognition.

He tightened his grip on the machete.

This is the one who had fooled him.

This is the one who had tried to drown him.

This is the one who had tried to use him.

This is the one who had made him feel afraid.

Only this time, Jason's enemy was real. This wasn't some boiler room with pipes and torrents of water; the little man wouldn't be able to throw him around this time. This was no dream. This was real, and the little man would die!

Fire ate its way across the dry floorboards.

Will pulled Lori out from under Krueger while the dream assassin was preoccupied with Voorhees. Will held her tight. They were cut off from Kia and Linderman by the flames.

Well, this was Lori's plan.

This was what they'd worked for—what they might even die for.

Will took one look at them.

Jason—tall, powerful, immobile.

Freddy—crouched, snarling, malevolent.

They hated each other.

"Freddy versus Jason," announced Lori, sensing the oncoming mayhem. "Place your bets!"

TWENTY

Freddy clambered slowly to his feet, never once taking his eyes off his enemy.

This was completely unexpected.

Krueger was wary, sizing Jason up.

"Well, go on," he growled. "Grunt something, you retarded mute! Show me what you got!"

Jason strode forward through the flame and swung down hard with his machete. Freddy pressed back against one of the cabin walls and twisted aside, easily dodging the blow. The machete sunk into the wall.

"You think I'm afraid of you now that we're in the real world?" laughed Freddy.

Jason swung the machete again, sideways this time, but Freddy jumped back causing the blade to barely miss his chest.

"You're slow, stupid and ya ain't got no style!"

***

Thank God, Lori was awake now.

There was no time to talk. Lori only had to take a look around to see how things had moved on since she'd taken the tranquilizer. They had to act on instinct now.

Lori saw the hole in the wall Jason had made when he first battered his way into the hall. She began to lead her wounded friend in that direction but Freddy saw this and danced past Jason's third machete swing, to block their way.

A sudden inrush of air caused the flames to erupt. Lori and Will screamed. The tatty old curtains caught fire.

***

Flame rushed up all three of the remaining wooden walls, and the sudden burst of heat caused Kia to fall back. She'd barely climbed to her feet when the inferno roared with this renewed ferocity.

As she stumbled away from the flame, Kia could see Linderman lying at the rear of the hall. He looked dazed. Quickly, she hurried over to him and helped him to his feet. She didn't notice the dark stain spreading across the back of his thin jacket.

***

Lori caught sight of her friends across the room through the sheets of flame.

She shouted at the top of her voice: "Kia!"

But there was no way they could meet up inside the hall. There was too much fire between them. And the room was filling up with smoke, making it impossible to breathe. So Lori led Will in the direction of the front door. It was still held closed by the plank Linderman had wedged in place.

Together, they grabbed hold of the makeshift bolt and tried to lift it. Will grimaced with pain, but was able to make the difference. The plank lifted, and they pushed through the door and out to safety.

On the other side of the hall, Kia helped Linderman out through a side door. Like Will and Lori before them, the two of them doubled up and coughed as soon as they hit the fresh air, almost retching from the smoke they'd inhaled.

***

Freddy was infuriated to see Will and Lori escape, but he would catch up with the brats soon enough. Right now, he had other things on his mind.

Jason swung a diagonal down-stroke with the machete, but Freddy snatched the deadly blade between the lethal fingers of his razor glove, trapping the machete long enough for Freddy to plant a hefty kick slam in the center of Jason's groin.

No reaction.

"No balls, huh, Voorhees?"

Jason used his free hand to grab Krueger by the front of his striped sweater, then shoved Krueger's head through a window—the first in a series of windows that ran down the length of the hall. Jason then

proceeded to drag Freddy sideways through the charred wood-panel wall, crashing Freddy's face through one window after the next. Then, when they reached the end of the wall, he let Freddy fall to the ground.

Who's laughing now, Krueger?

Jason picked Freddy up again, but this time holding him high in both arms. Then he tossed the stunned dream demon out of the building!

In Jason's powerful arms, Freddy was a piece of nothing. He flew through the open air before crashing through the roof of what used to be the camp's administration building.

But Jason hadn't finished. In fact, he'd only just begun. Last time they'd faced off, it had been on Krueger's terms. But there was room for only one murderous maniac in Crystal Lake.

He took a step forward on to the porch, intending to go after Krueger's broken body, but was blocked by a sudden collapse of fiery debris.

***

Linderman clutched at the wound in his side. Kia was helping him to get away, but each footstep on the ground sent pain shooting through his torso.

Kia noticed his reaction, saw how he gripped his back, and how his hand was covered in blood.

"Jesus, you're hurt," she said, concerned.

He tried to smile but his face was white as a sheet. "Don't worry about me... Just a scratch."

He couldn't go any further.

He lowered himself against a tree trunk, half-sitting, nearly falling to the ground.

"Gonna rest here a second..." He sounded weary, his voice fading almost to a whisper.

"Linderman, I—"

"I'm fine, Kia," he interrupted. He saw the deep concern in her face. "Really. Now get out of here. Go get help."

Kia wasn't convinced. "But—"

"Just go!"

He was right. He needed professional help. She had to go get someone.

"Okay, okay," she relented. "I'll be back as soon as I can!"

At that, she turned to leave—then stopped.

"You were really brave in there, Linderman," she said, trying to reassure him.

"Charlie," he whispered. "My first name's Charlie."

All this time they'd known each other, and they were connecting now?

Kia knelt down beside him and gently took hold of his shoulders.

"Then listen up, Charlie. You better fucking be here when I get back!"

"Why?"

"So I can kick your ass if you tell anyone I did this..."

She kissed Linderman on the lips, long and hot.

Awesome.

Linderman looked at her, smiling, as she rose and dashed off into the woods. He couldn't believe it. All their arguing...

He winced in pain and pulled his hand away from the wound. There was blood, too much blood.

Linderman knew it was bad, he'd known since he hit the nail on the wall, but he didn't want Kia to see it. Kia, lovely Kia.

God, she was gorgeous.

Linderman smiled.

Despite it all, as the darkness came down, Charlie Linderman was a happy guy—happier than he'd ever been. And as he closed his eyes and let his head slump down to one side, Linderman remained happy for the last few seconds of his life.

***

"We have to go find the others," said Lori, concerned.

She looked to Will, to his bleeding side.

"Can you walk?" she asked.

"Can try," he replied through gritted teeth.

Carefully, Lori helped Will to his feet. Then she quickly surveyed the scene, the whole camp now brightly lit by the blazing recreation hall.

She saw a small rowing boat moored down by the floating pier.

"There's a boat!"

She put an arm round Will's side and they headed off. They needed to find Kia and Linderman, then they needed to get the hell out of there and let Jason and Freddy knock seven shades of shit out of each other.

***

Kia could only think of Linderman as she crept through the trees surrounding Camp Crystal Lake. Would he be alright on his own? Would Freddy or Jason find...

What was that?

She paused. Thought she'd heard a noise, but nothing.

So she carried on, and in a short while she could see out, through a gap in the trees, to the lakeside. She could see Will and Lori moving toward the shore of the lake, Lori was helping Will over in the direction of the pier.

Kia smiled with relief—they were still alive!—and was about to call out to them when she saw Freddy Krueger leap out of the woods from behind them, his claw raised ready to slice through Will's neck.

"Freddy!" shouted Kia.

Lori and Will stopped, looked back in panic. So did Freddy.

Krueger began to stalk over to her.

"Mmmm," he licked his lips. "Dark meat."

That bastard.

That crack infuriated Kia, but straight away she sensed that it was meant to. He was trying to make her lose her cool when she needed it most. She'd met guys like him before. And she knew just how to deal with them.

She stepped out of the cover of the wood, and looked at him like he was nothing.

"So you're the one everyone's afraid of?" she jibed. "What kind of *faggot* runs around in a floppy hat and a Christmas sweater? Please. Your *Momma* knit you that? Or was she too busy sucking off the local football team?"

Krueger stopped smiling.

Now he came at her, at Kia, letting Lori and Will sneak away behind him.

Lori knew what this was all about and mouthed silent thanks to her friend. She just hoped that Kia would do the right thing and get out of there.

Which was the last thing on Kia's mind right now.

"And let's talk about that *face* of yours," she shouted at the oncoming killer. "You take a look at yourself lately? Cause honey, I've flushed better looking things than you down the *toilet!*"

His devastated face contorted with rage, Freddy was heading directly for her.

"I mean, get real. You're not even scary." She wriggled her fingers in a mockery of the deadly glove. "And what's with the butter-knives? You trying to compensate for something? Maybe coming up a little short between the legs? I mean, you've got these teensy-weensy things..." She curled her fingers and wriggled them again. "And Jason's got this big, old..." She held her hands wide apart as if measuring out the machete in the air.

Freddy Krueger stopped.

Kia had been ready to run at the last second, but now he'd stopped. He was just staring at her.

She hadn't expected this.

"What?" she wondered aloud.

No, Krueger wasn't staring at Kia at all. He was staring at something behind her.

Eves full of fear, Kia turned and...

WHUCKKK!

Jason's machete hacked down into Kia's chest with such force that after crushing her entire sternum into her lungs, the blow sent her stumbling back through the air until she slammed hard into a tree.

That wasn't the sound of branches breaking. It was the sound of Kia's back.

Broken.

Impaled.

Dead.

Kia's corpse crumpled to the ground.

"K-I-A," sniggered Freddy. "Killed In Action—*Aha-hahahahahahahaha!!!*"

Lori screamed.

She had just seen her best friend slaughtered, hacked to fuck by Jason Voorhees.

Aching, weak, Will grabbed her arm and tried to pull her away in the direction of the boat.

"Come on, Lori. Let's go. We can't help her anymore..."

Very practical. Very rational. But the wrong answer.

Lori shook Will off. Change of plan.

Lori was through crying. She was through with being a victim of these bastards.

"No," she shook her head, "I'm staying."

Will reacted as if Lori had slapped him hard across the face.

"Are you crazy?" he yelled. "You got what you wanted, Lori! You pulled Freddy out and Jason's fighting him! What more do you want?"

"He killed my mother, Will. It was Freddy. My Dad covered it up to protect me. He didn't do it."

For a moment, Will was lost.

What was she saying? *Krueger* killed her Mom?

Then he remembered what Mark had said about his brother's so-called suicide. Mark said Freddy had killed Bobby, Bobby didn't commit suicide. What if Lori was right? What if...

He got it.

Typical of this bastard—get people thinking the wrong thing, spread chaos, panic, fear—play people off against one another. That's

the Krueger way—in just the same way Krueger had torn Elm Street apart all those years ago when he was nothing but a child-killing nobody.

"I know that now," sighed Will.

"Look," she said. "Freddy's taken everything from us. He ruined both our pasts."

And he had. Whether Will understood it or not, whether he knew it or not, Krueger had always been there, like a cancer festering in the background, ruining all their lives. Whether they'd lost their Moms, whether they'd been locked away in an institution, whether they had lost their friends, or fought with their parents—at the end of the day, it had all been Freddy Krueger.

Freddy... fucking... Krueger.

The fire from the burning camp was reflected in Lori's eyes. But the heat of the conflagration was nothing compared to the rage she felt within.

Her Mom.

Her Dad.

Gibb.

Kia.

Lori stood up, looked across at Freddy and said: "I'm not leaving until I see him die."

TWENTY-ONE

Jason cocked his head to one side. He stood quite motionless, his arms hanging limp by his side. He was looking at Kia's body. The way she lay there. The blood. The open eyes.

Death.

He was looking at death.

He watched her.

Dead.

"*AKKKHHKH!*"

Jason roared like a beast in pain, the five razor knives of Freddy's glove plunging deep into his left shoulder.

Krueger had attacked him from behind.

Reacting with superhuman speed, Jason whirled and struck Freddy with the flat of his machete blade. The freak flew sprawling to the ground.

They were near the new construction zone now and...

THWUCK!

Jason caught Freddy a second time, sending the red-skinned devil bastard crashing into a rack of oxyacetylene tanks. Krueger yelped in pain as his back a second fell onto the tanks, toppling the canisters like ten pins. He tried to reach out, to slow his fall, but instead his glove accidentally sliced the stem valve off one of the tanks.

An explosive expulsion of gas through the damaged valve sent the canister rocketing skyward like a missile.

Which gave Freddy one hell of an idea...

Jason stomped heavily across the construction site in Freddy's direction, his machete ready to deal with the Elm Street maniac once and for all. He would hack Krueger into thirteen bloody pieces.

But Krueger had other plans. Laughing, he slunk over to a second rack of oxyacetylene tanks.

Jason was even closer now, his measured stride beating in time with his festering black heart.

Freddy smiled and fanned the razors of his claw-hand. Then he proceeded to slice all the stem valves off all the oxyacetylene tanks,

one after the other.

Suddenly the clearing was filled with the whooshing of escaped gas, as the tanks explosively decompressed, then began firing off the rack like a mortar shell volley.

Freddy kept well back as the tanks hurtled crazily outwards in all directions through the air, one of them slamming with body-mashing force into the middle of Jason's chest, causing the masked killer to miss a step.

Freddy continued the attack, slicing more valves, sending more tanks airborne. Most of the tanks rocketed off in random, useless directions, but enough of them found their target, hitting their mark and pummeling Jason backwards.

Jason couldn't resist as gas tank after gas tank punched him back into the center of the construction area, a maze of scaffolding and piping that made Freddy feel almost at home.

WHABM!

One last tank smashed into Jason's face, cracking his mask and sending him staggering back into a half-finished building. Arms flailing, Jason fell in an ungainly heap among the scaffolding, bringing the bolted framework crashing down on his head. Bar after bar, pole after pole—the entire scaffold fell down on top of Jason, instantly burying him beneath a heap of impossibly disjoined metal.

There was a crackle of heat lightning in the distance. It illuminated a banner that lay askew on top of the collapsed pile of scaffolding.

The banner read: "Camp Crystal Lake Welcomes You Back".

Krueger laughed... until he heard the groan of metal on metal and saw Jason Voorhees slowly fight his way up through the construction debris. Inch by inch, Voorhees pulled his way free, until at last he was standing on his heavy-booted feet again.

Another flash of lightning.

Where....

"Up here, asshole!"

Freddy had taken up position on top of a nearby wall of scaffolding, from where he was able to look down on Jason.

A pile of rebar was stacked together beside Krueger.

Rebar—long, thin stainless steel poles used to reinforce concrete. Long. Thin. Hard. Deadly.

Krueger up-ended the rebar stack and watched as the poles slid down through the air and fell down towards Jason Voorhees, standing on the ground. The metal shafts descended, shooting like spears towards the masked killer.

SCHZZZINNG!

One of the poles skewered Jason through his right shoulder, boring a hole clean through his solid undead mass of flesh and bone.

SCHZZZINNG!

A second shaft drilled neatly through Jason's left leg. both bars causing thick, glistening dark blood to ooze sluggishly out from Jason's shafted wounds.

Jason staggered; not only were the two lengths of rebar stuck through his body, but they went straight on and down into the ground.

Voorhees hung there, run through, pinned like a bug on a board, yet partially supported by the two stainless steel rods that had speared him and were now fixing him to the dirt.

Freddy laughed at the stupid idiot, then skipped off across the scaffolding in search of another weapon. If he couldn't kill Jason in his kid—ugly dreams, he'd just have to settle for the real thing in this world.

Jason struggled to pull himself free from the rebar, but every time he moved, he began to fall, his body sliding further down the painful steel rods. He jerked backwards, trying to pull the two spears out of the ground. As he did, the rough steel poles rubbed and moved through the inside of his body, dragging and scraping through Jason's rotting innards.

Thick black pieces of corpse pulp dripped out of Jason and fell onto the ground.

But finally, ever so slowly, he was able to pull one of the bars free.

Freddy could see Jason's pathetic struggle; but it didn't matter what Voorhees did now—he was way too late to save his sorry carcass.

Krueger had run over to a heavy cement mixer. The machine stood on a wooden platform up among the scaffolding. Connected to the mixer was a steel cable. Krueger followed the cable with his eyes, tracing it up from the mixer to the boom arm of a crane that stood high above the construction site.

The maniac laughed in delight, then got himself behind the cement mixer and began to push it with his shoulder.

Down below, Jason had just extracted the second rebar spear from the ground.

Freddy pushed harder—Voorhees hadn't seen him; he had his own problems. Able to move at last, Jason grabbed hold of the first of the two spears—the one in his leg—and began to pull the rebar out through the wound. But it would take more than one tug to remove the entire length of the steel.

One hand...

Two...

And...

Driven by some unknown instinct, Jason looked up to see the cement mixer swinging down towards his face. Pushed off the scaffolding and connected to the crane by the steel cable, the mixer swung down like a pendulum.

Jason waited stolidly for the...

BWWHAAAMMMM!!!

The mixer smashed into Jason, delivering a sledgehammer blow, before ricocheting away from his body, striking a wall, and then—like pendulums do—beginning its return swing.

Jason Voorhees collapsed.

The crushing mixer barely missed his head on its way back up towards the scaffold.

High above, Freddy had long since left the platform where he'd found the mixer. Now he'd set his sights on a massive debris-filled cart. Depending on where the hockey-masked retard had got to, Krueger could either drop the cart on him, or ram him with it.

The cart was heavy, and Freddy had to strain to get it moving—he didn't have to put up with this lame exercise crap in the dream world!

He caught a glimpse of Jason, reeling, trying to get back up on his feet. The jerk was standing at the foot of a ramp that led right up to where Freddy was struggling with the steel garbage cart.

Perfect.

Freddy heaved the cart along to the top of the ramp, lined up the wheels, then *let the metal roll.*

The cart hurtled down the ramp, its deadly cargo sure to turn Jason into Crystal Lake pulp… when suddenly the cart stopped.

What?

Its wheels had caught on something half way down the ramp. Was it caught in a tangle of rope? Was one of the planks sticking up?

What?

WHAT?

Furious, Krueger snarled, then hurried down the ramp to dislodge the car—

Just as the swinging cement mixer, already forgotten, completed its return journey and crashed into the side of the scaffolding.

The supports beneath the ramp shook, then buckled… then collapsed completely.

Before Freddy knew it, he was falling over the side of the sloping wooden platform.

But he didn't hit the ground…

Somehow his foot had got caught in the coupling that connected the steel cable to the suspended cement mixer. So now, like a total fucking moron, Krueger hung upside down, dangling in front of the cement mixer, which itself was swinging to and fro beside the scaffold.

And he was gathering momentum.

Left…

Right…

FWHACK!

Krueger slammed into one of the construction site walls. He howled in pain, then found himself dropping, before suddenly jerking to a halt in mid-air once more.

Krueger was stunned, and now hanging no more than six feet above ground level. He opened his malevolent yellow eyes.

No! Jason had removed the rebar from his leg and was standing again.

Freddy's sinister brows arched with fear. He tried to free himself... scrabbling in panic... tried to...

Tried to—

Jason still had a long, thin bar of stainless steel protruding through both sides of his shoulder when he laid a black leather-gloved hand on Krueger and dragged the snarling red and green wretch down from the cement mixer.

Freddy tried to squirm free, but it was no use—Jason Voorhees locked him in a merciless bear hug.

Freddy screamed, sunk his razors into Jason's neck...

Jason shook his head violently, and squeezed Freddy more tightly, squeezing the life out of him.

They were gripped... Locked in mortal...

KWHA-BOOOOMMM!!!

The debris cart had come loose, charged down the ramp and crashed into them with such force that both Freddy and Jason were rammed through the air, out of the construction site.

Limbs trailing, the immortal combatants were hurled an impossible distance, before finally crashing to earth near the floating pier on the edge of the lake.

***

Barely alive, vaguely conscious, Freddy Krueger cast a yellow-slitted look at his undead opponent, then slowly started to crawl away along the pier.

***

The impact of the cart had dislodged the second piece of rebar from Jason's shoulder, leaving a huge open wound near to his neck. His mask was cracked, charred and bloodied. Thick, black blood dripped slowly down his vast torso.

Jason got up.

Stumbling.

Jason never stumbled.

No matter how they attacked him, no matter what they did to him, he always sat up, smoothly, controlled, then rose mechanically to his feet—but not this night.

Here, now, Jason had been battered beyond belief.

He staggered to his feet.

He watched as Krueger tried to crawl away.

Lori had been right.

This was truly a clash of ungodly titans.

And, as she had so fervently hoped, Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees were killing each other.

***

Slowly, ever so slowly, Krueger dragged himself along the length of the pier. Despite the agony, despite everything he'd just suffered, the maniac managed to break open a quiet sneer.

He was heading for the water. Poor Jason's favorite thing, of course.

Krueger tried to laugh, but just coughed—an awful rasping sound, thick with internal damage.

By going to the end of the pier, Krueger wasn't heading into a corner, he wasn't trapping himself—he was daring that moron Jason to come after him.

But this wasn't a dream, and Freddy wasn't unlocking any irrational fears or complexes buried deep in Jason's subconscious.

Freddy wasn't to know that Jason had already spent countless undying years trapped at the bottom of Crystal Lake.

In the real world, Jason Voorhees didn't give a shit about water. Water was good for drowning people. He knew that from very personal experience.

***

Jason stood tall now.

His strength was returning.

Krueger.

Where?

Jason saw Freddy Krueger lying on his wretched belly, crawling like a worm as far as he could, down to the end of the pier. Jason walked straight on after him.

The wooden boards of the pier creaked and buckled as Jason bore down on Freddy. Jason swung his machete down towards his adversary's scarred, repulsive face, but Krueger was too fast.

Jason didn't expect this.

Freddy struck.

He swiped his razor-gloved hand upwards and sliced off Jason's fingers!

Thip—Thip—Thip—

Three severed fingers fell to the floor, landing lightly on the wooden boards of the pier...

Thunk!

...followed by the machete.

"*Aha-hahahahahahahahaha!!!*"

Catching Jason completely by surprise, the master of trickery jumped to his feet and snatched up Jason's machete in his left hand.

Krueger stood there, roaring in triumph—the machete in his left hand, the razor glove on his right.

Now he had both weapons. He was in control.

He was Freddy Krueger.

And he was here to kick Jason's flaming ass!

***

Once Will realized Lori wasn't going to leave, he knew he couldn't either. Yes, he was hurting. Yes, he was bleeding. But he couldn't leave her like this, not alone against those two bastards.

So he limped after her, and the two of them forgot about the boat entirely—they were going nowhere now.

Their first thought had been to try and find some weapons, but then they'd heard all the commotion over from the construction site, and had become distracted.

Lori wanted to go and see what was making all the noise, but Will begged her not to. They knew what the noise was; it was Freddy and Jason breaking all hell loose. It was more important that they should go find something to defend themselves with.

But what they'd found was Linderman's body.

Another blow on top of everything they'd suffered.

Another devastating shock.

Another one down.

Almost everyone they knew had died, and now the two of them were here alone. No one was coming to rescue them. No one had gone to fetch the police. No one was coming to deal with Jason and Freddy.

Lori and Will were utterly alone, but still Lori was determined to see Krueger dead.

Finally, they'd found some drums full of boat fuel.

They knew the gasoline was good, but they weren't sure how best to use it. If they set fire to it, Jason and Freddy would just move away from the blaze. Nor could Will and Lori do much with the fuel drums themselves; the drums were just too heavy.

Lori had suggested fuel bombs—put some of the fuel in glass bottles, stuff a torn piece of shirt or something in, then light the damned things.

But they'd seen Voorhees at the rave. He'd been covered head to foot in flame, and it had done nothing. And as for Krueger... that guy looked like he'd already been torched many times over—and in their nightmares he always took them to that boiler room, the place with the roaring furnaces.

So they knew that the fuel tanks were somehow their best option, only they hadn't got the finer points nailed down. They didn't have a plan of action.

Lori and Will were still working through all this when Jason and Freddy came crashing down onto the pier behind them. The freaks had been thrown through the air over Lori and Will's heads.

They weren't in the dream world anymore, so how was this possible?

Now the two embattled teenagers could only look on in slack-jawed amazement as they saw Freddy launch his frenzied razor attack on the retreating, lumbering form of Jason Voorhees.

***

Freddy totally had Jason on the defensive—hacking away at Jason with the ugly retard's own machete, snipping away at the open holes in Jason's mask with the piercing ruthless finger blades, laughing all the while.

Jason backed away, mute, futilely trying to defend himself.

They were heading out towards the far end of the pier.

For Lori and Will, it was now or never. Grimly, they both suddenly realized what it was they had to do.

Will began turning a pump handle on the top of a fifty gallon drum of boat fuel. The drum was connected to a long nozzle which Lori had taken and was now pointing along the pier, towards Freddy and Jason.

Lori shook her head, her soul alive with pure defiance.

"Not this time, Krueger," she vowed quietly to herself, and she held tight to the nozzle as it began to pour boat fuel all over the floating dock.

Krueger and Freddy continued their danse macabre, oblivious to the flammable liquid running down the dock towards them.

Back at the tank, Will staggered, clutching his side.

"Lori!" he shouted.

Lori turned and looked. Her first reaction was panic. Was he crying for help? His wound?

No, Will was pointing to a metal tank on the other side of the dock.

"The propane tank!" he called.

Straight away she knew what he meant. She turned and sprayed fuel all over the propane tank and all the metal cylinders stacked around it.

***

Gotcha!

Freddy drove the two blades of his index and middle fingers clean through the eyeholes in Jason's mask, the razors stabbing forward like cold steel nails of mutilation.

Jason howled in bestial rage.

Freddy pushed harder, driving his razors deeper into the mask. The knives pushed through Jason's eyes, tearing them wide open, gouging them, before cracking through into Jason's skull and on into the unholy gray matter of Jason's brain.

Jason tried to pull away, but his face was impaled on the twin stab attack of Freddy's glove.

Freddy gouged deeper.

Voorhees howled.

THWISHK!!!

The tips of the razors burst through the back of Jason's malformed head in an explosion of rotted bone and viscous black pus!

Jason staggered back, blinded, but by sheer virtue of his weight he managed to pull free of the knives. The brute collapsed onto the wooden pier with a deafening thud.

Krueger roared with sickening laughter.

He paused to delicately lick the black pus off his blades, then pounced towards the wretched Voorhees—Krueger, the raggedy man, leaping through the air, limbs wild in a flurry of blurred red and green.

***

The gas was all over the pier. Jason and Freddy were trapped. This was the end.

Hold on. Lori didn't smoke. No lighter. No matches… Goddamn it.

Will had nothing either.

Shit!

They needed…

The sky over the burning recreation hall glowed amber with the flame.

Of course!

Lori ran back toward the flaming ruin, and half-fell, half-dived up the short few stairs leading up to the burning porch.

Debris fell, almost catching her, but she managed to duck out of the way. At this close range, the heat was truly intense. Lori couldn't stand it for much longer; she felt the face of her skin drying with each passing second.

Quickly, she bent down and managed to grab two burning pieces of wood from just inside the hall doorway.

Two burning pieces of debris... two flaming torches!

Grunting with the exertion, and recoiling from the almost overpowering heat of the fire, Lori turned and ran as fast as she could, straight back to the pier.

When she got back, she found Will almost lying on the ground. He was holding his wounded side and looked way too pale.

No time to waste.

Will feebly raised a hand, ready to take one of the torches from her—but she sped right past him and walked out onto the floating dock.

She stopped only when she reached the edge of the gas they'd spilled. Then she held the torches, one in each hand, high above her head.

"KRUEGER!" she shouted at the top of her voice.

***

Freddy ignored her. Jason was beaten, blinded, whipped bad. The bastard's mask was a mess of cracks.

Now it was really time to finish this thing. Freddy stood victorious over the beaten body of the Crystal Lake Killer and laughed.

Voorhees was blind. He'd lost three of his fingers. He was pulverized, crushed, beaten, near to death. And now Freddy had Jason's machete. What better way to finally put an end to this hulking moron?

***

Lori threw the first of the brands down on to the fuel soaked boards of the floating pier. She threw it hard—hurling the torch as

near to Freddy as she could.

Immediately, the dock went up in flames, flames that ran the length and breadth of the spilled gas, flames that raced down towards the end of the pier, towards Freddy and Jason.

But Lori wasn't finished yet.

She took the second burning stick and hurled it at the gas-covered propane tank. The tank was ablaze in an instant. It was only a matter of time before it grew so hot that it would…

Lori turned and ran back to Will.

She put an arm around him and dragged him as best she could, and then the two of them turned tail and ran for their fucking lives.

***

At last…

The end.

The ultimate finale.

The death of Jason Voorhees.

Freddy lifted the machete, pulled back his arm to make sure he got in a good mask-splitting, decapitating swing… when suddenly his eyes were caught by a reflection in the machete blade.

Something bright.

Something moving, moving fast.

FIRE!

Fire like the flames in the boiler room where he'd first been murdered by the parents of Springwood. Fire like the flames of Hell where he'd since spent most of his depraved nightmarish existence. Fire—all-consuming, all destroying, agonizing fire.

Krueger held back, terror wiping the murderous smile clean off his devil-face. The wall of flame was racing down the pier towards him.

He—

Noooo!

Jason suddenly sat up and thrust his fist right into Freddy's gut, bursting a hole through Krueger's noisome stomach.

Freddy cried out in pain.

The searing fire!

Jason!

Freddy fell back, reeling from the disemboweling blow, and retreating from the oncoming inferno.

Suddenly Jason was at him. Voorhees stood up, reached out with both arms, then clamped his hands hard around Freddy's razor claw.

Freddy wriggled his fingers, trying to cut, trying to slice Jason. But his efforts were in vain. The Crystal Lake maniac locked the glove in a vise-like grip.

Jason pulled. He heaved. With all his might, Jason tore Freddy's arm straight out of its socket, sending a spray of unholy blood pluming into the clear water of Crystal Lake.

Freddy screamed, turned and shoved the machete forward, straight through into Jason's black heart.

This was ultimate violence.

This was psychotic undead annihilation.

***

Lori and Will ran down to the shoreline next to the pier and made straight for the water.

She looked up. She could see them.

Freddy driving the machete through Jason's chest...

Jason swinging helplessly at Freddy with Freddy's own arm, slashing the air with the infamous razor glove...

The wall of fire had reached them. Any second now and...

The propane tank...

Lori and Will dived into the lake.

KWHA-KHA-BOOOOOMMMMMMMM!!!!

The tank and all the surrounding cylinders were blown sky-high.

Freddy and Jason were blasted off the pier and into the water—the two of them locked in a double death-grip, fighting to the last. They sank deep into the water, just as the surface of the lake caught fire beneath a layer of ignited boat fuel.

Freddy and Jason were dead.

***

After a while, Lori dragged herself out of the water, then helped Will to clamber up onto the wrecked pier.

The end of the pier was gone, blown apart. What was left of the wooden jetty was mostly ablaze, except right here, by the shore where the fire had been extinguished by the force of the blast.

And the lake...

There was no way anything could have survived the explosion. No way. And even if they did, the lake was ablaze. They'd either burn or drown down there.

Lori and Will lay on the charred wood of the dock. Will looked real bad. She cradled him in her arms.

My God, it's over.

Lori's plan had worked.

At that moment, at that precise second of realization, all the exhaustion, all the fear, all the sorrow—it all came flooding out of Lori in a wave of overwhelming emotion. Tears ran down her cheeks.

Now that Freddy and Jason were dead, the tension poured out of her. She hadn't realized just how much she'd been holding in. But now... the relief!

Her tears spilled onto Will's face. His eyes were closed.

"I'm gonna get you help, okay?" she promised. "Just stay with me, Will. Stay with me."

Will's eyes flickered open; he was losing consciousness.

"... not going anywhere..." he gasped, his voice barely a whisper. "...promised you..."

***

"*Aha-hahahahahahahahaha!!!*"

WHAT???

Lori looked up to see Freddy Krueger erupt with a roar from the depths of the burning lake.

No—it can't be...

Freddy Krueger, Springwood's most hated bastard, dragged himself up onto the wreckage of what remained at the end of the pier.

His body was smoking, burned.

His sweater and hat were gone—burned away.

His scarred, pitted skin glistened with greasy black oil water.

His right arm was missing, leaving just a torn jagged stump of hatred.

His left hand...

In his left hand, Freddy held the machete of Jason Voorhees.

This was the new Freddy—the Freddy who'd fallen to Earth and been sent to Hell and back.

The Freddy they'd tried to kill.

The Freddy who'd been locked in steel-edged death with Jason Voorhees. Machete versus glove. Fire versus water. Nightmare versus reality.

All burned away. All cremated. Leaving nothing but seething, feral rage.

No jokes.

No taunts.

No more fucking games.

Freddy Krueger charged toward them, raking the air with Jason's bloody machete.

***

Lori looked around, frantic, for a weapon, for anything.

She could hear his racing footsteps coming down the pier towards them. She could feel the heat of Krueger's almost tangible fury above the warmth from the blazing fire on the lake.

"Runnn..." Will said weakly, lying flat on his back, barely able to lift his head.

He was no good; she'd have to leave him here—go on alone. But Lori shook her head. Hadn't they promised they'd never leave each other again?

Resolute, Lori stood up and placed herself between the semi-conscious body of her first love, and the ranting, machete-wielding rampage of the charging dream butcher. Her gesture was just that: a gesture.

Lori had no weapon to defend herself with. She had no way to fight Freddy. No way to save herself... or Will. But she wouldn't be afraid. She would deny Krueger this one last pleasure. He could kill her, he could hack her in two, but she wouldn't scream. Wouldn't let him kill her soul.

Freddy seethed over the two stricken lovers, the machete leveled and ready to chop the little fuckers into Hades.

Lori looked at Krueger, gazed into his wild, yellow eyes—and saw nothing but cruelty, anger and loathing. Lori stared into his eyes and saw pure undiluted evil.

The machete swung high...

Lori was ready.

Krueger howled—*as his own five razor fingers of death burst out through the front of his chest.*

Fine droplets of Freddy's black blood puffed through the air like a spray, landing on Lori's clothes, her hands, her face.

Krueger's eyes glazed with disbelief, his black—lipped mouth fell open, his shark tooth jaw hung wide with shock.

He looked down.

His own glove.

His own motherfucking glove!

Krueger had been punched through the back with brutal force by someone using his own murder blades.

He had been punched... through the back... by Jason.

Indomitable.

Relentless.

Indestructible.

Unstoppable.

Jason Voorhees!

***

Lori fell back, sickened by the jet of Freddy's foul blood.

She could see Jason. He was in the water, clinging with one hand to the edge of the ruined pier. But how could he reach?

Now she saw it: Jason's other hand, holding on to Freddy's arm, the arm with the razor glove.

Jason had used Freddy's arm like a machete.

He had lunged forward, his body half rising out of the lake, and had stabbed Freddy with the razors on the end of Krueger's own arm!

***

Time stood still.

The two maniacs seemed to hold their final place for an eternity.

Freddy gasped.

He'd been skewered with his own blades. Blood trickled from the corners of his charred mouth.

Foul-smelling loops of intestine sagged and excreted through the open wound.

Jason waited, half-in and half-out of the water, not letting go of the glove until he was certain that...

Freddy's arm dropped, releasing the machete.

The machete slipped from his fingers.

It fell, landing point-first in the wooden pier.

Finally, Jason let go of Freddy's severed arm, leaving it to hang by the claw stuck in Freddy's back.

Now!

Lori's eyes shot in the direction of the discarded machete—she could do it!

Krueger saw her, saw the look in her eyes.

He watched mutely as she ran forward and took hold of the weapon.

He tried to speak, but all he could do was cough up gobbets of foul black blood.

She could do it!

Lori pulled the machete back, ready to strike.

She stared at Krueger, held his weakened venomous gaze, and said: "Welcome to my world... bitch!"

Then she swung with all her might, and used Jason's machete to hack Freddy Krueger's neck clean off the trunk of his scabrous little

bastard neck.

THUBD!

Krueger's head hit the pier then rolled over into the lake with a pathetic splash.

His headless body dropped to its knees.

It swayed for a moment before Will staggered up alongside Lori and kicked the decapitated corpse in the chest, knocking it back off the pier and into the water, to join Krueger's head.

The body sank out of view.

Freddy.

Beheaded.

His mutilated corpse now lying dead in the real world, at the bottom of Crystal Lake.

***

After all the noise, after all the violence, all the horror—silence.

***

The fire on the lake and the fire in the recreation hall both roared at full strength as Lori stood, bloody and grimy, still holding onto the machete.

In the end, it was she who had killed Freddy, not…

She heard a noise.

Creaking—the groaning of wooden boards.

Quickly, machete at the ready, she turned to see where the sound had come from.

She looked down and saw Jason Voorhees.

Somehow Lori knew that Jason's supernatural life force was ebbing away.

***

Jason let go of the pier and slid back into the water.

He raised his mask to look up at Lori—and for a moment she'd remembered her dream… of little Jason, drowning in the water of old

Camp Crystal Lake.

She'd reached down to help him, to try to rescue him.

But now she was looking into the eyes of Jason the man—Jason the killer.

Jason's eyes squinted out at her through the cracks in his broken mask. Somehow his eyes had already healed since Freddy had gouged them out with his glove; and in them, Lori could see...

Lori could see something in Jason's eyes—some thought, some feeling—but what?

Recognition?

Acceptance?

Peace?

***

Jason's head sank beneath the surface of the water—the lake was reclaiming its own.

Lori looked down...

The hockey mask.

She could see it—sinking, submerging—then it too was gone, its battered white plastic the last thing she saw.

A mere few bubbles rose to meet the surface of the lake, then stopped.

Jason Voorhees was dead.

***

The burning lake spread out before Lori as she looked out from the edge of the ruined pier.

Trey, Blake, Freeburg, Stubbs, Linderman, Gibb, and Kia—all dead.

But now it was over.

Their nightmare was over.

The real horror had been defeated.

Will stepped up beside Lori, took her hand in his own.

They had their whole lives ahead of them, lives they could spend together. There was so much they needed to do. She needed to

rebuild her relationship with her father, needed to go back to Sheriff Williams, needed to put an end to Westin Hills.

They embraced.

They had won.

It was time to go home.

EPILOG

Lori placed a new candle in the window of her bedroom in 1428 Elm Street.

Two months had passed since the nightmare first begun for her, but she still felt uneasy about the place.

Trey had died here. And her Mom.

"You sure you're ready for this?"

Hearing the voice, Lori turned from the window and saw Will lying in her bed. He was under the covers, and didn't seem to be wearing a stitch of clothing.

"You kidding?" she smiled. "It's all I ever wanted."

"We could wait, though," offered Will. "I mean, if you..."

"Forget it, Will. My Dad's gone for the whole weekend. We've got the house to ourselves."

Still wearing her bustier and thong, Lori clambered into bed next to him.

"Now quit stalling," she said suggestively, "and kiss me."

Will leant over and kissed Lori on the lips.

When eventually he lay back again, she looked at the long scar on the side of his chest. She ran her fingers over it. A souvenir from Jason.

"Does it still hurt?" she asked.

"Not so much anymore."

Lori lay back and stared up at the ceiling. "It's funny. After everything that happened... I actually ended up feeling a little sorry for Jason."

Will snorted derisively.

"I was in his nightmare," countered Lori. "I saw Freddy torturing him, saw him drowning that scared little boy."

She shivered.

Over these two months, she'd tried hard to bury the memory of everything that had happened to them. But in her heart of hearts, she knew she never would. She knew that the events of nine weeks ago

would haunt her for the rest of her life. She could never forget—but maybe, in time, she could learn to deal.

"Freddy got what he deserved," said Will. "They both did."

He placed his hand on her, got her to turn on her side to face him.

"Now enough about them," he smiled. "This is our night."

Lori nodded and hugged Will close.

There was so much to talk about, and to think about, but maybe not tonight.

"I love you so much, Will."

She couldn't believe they were finally together like this.

Nor could Will.

"I love you too," he replied with true feeling. "I always have. There wasn't a night back at Westin when I didn't fall asleep thinking about you."

Lori's eyes welled up with tears, and they kissed again. The kiss was hungry. It was the kiss of two young people totally giving themselves over to one another for the very first time.

"Will..." said Lori softly.

Will ignored her and grabbed her more tightly.

Then he squeezed her hard... *too* hard...

"Will, easy..."

But he wasn't listening. Suddenly, he was all over her, kneading her flesh, biting at her throat.

"Will!"

He placed a hand inside Lori's vest and ripped it wide open, baring everything she had to offer.

Lori tried to push him back. "What's *wrong* with you?" she complained.

He said nothing. Nothing at all.

He pulled her arms up over her head, crossed her wrists, then pinned them down with his forearm.

Lori didn't understand. What was going on?

He was being too rough, way too aggressive. This wasn't fun any more.

"Get off me!" she shouted.

But he kept her pinned in place.

She struggled.

He smiled.

Then he raised his free hand over her face and laughed as *Freddy's five razors* burst out through the ends of his fingers, shredding away the flesh of his hand.

Lori screamed as sheets of skin and blood fell across her naked breasts.

She screamed.

Will laughed.

From inside the window of 1428 Elm Street came the screaming sound of death, borne on the ripping evisceration of five deadly knives.

***

One, two Freddy's coming for you.
Three, four, better lock your door.
Five, six, grab a crucifix.
Seven, eight, gonna stay up late.
Nine, ten, never sleep... again.